

The Link Was Strong.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

ALL events and characters described in this novel are imaginary, but the original of Tremynach is the town of Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales. Merthyr Tydfil has a museum, which is a municipal institution, and has never been under private ownership. The family of Tomlinson is a fictional one and no reference is intended to any of the former local ironmasters or their descendants.

Chapter One

THE SHEEP were cream-coloured and fat and they moved leisurely along the narrow country lane, blocking the entire pathway between high hedges and giving the effect of a sluggish river in no hurry to reach the sea. Rear members of the horde bleated in protest when their escort, which consisted of two men on horseback and two dogs, came inconveniently close, but the sheep in the middle and those in the front continued to progress placidly until, after rounding a bend, they were met by an oncoming car.

The driver stopped, then reversed some distance to a slightly wider and straighter part of the lane. After a moment's hesitation, the sheep plodded on until they reached the car, but here they came to a standstill, obviously determined not to pass singly along the narrow space available. They wanted the whole width of the lane for themselves. They waited for the car to move out of their way.

The girl at the wheel laughed. Instinctively one used the word girl although she had turned thirty, but her air of youthful gaiety was expressive of a teenager's carefree attitude to life. She had a long narrow face, straight nose with slight arch to the nostrils, and almond-shaped dark blue eyes that, at the moment, were alight with merriment at the wooden obstinacy of the sheep.

The man sitting beside her shared her amusement. He was a few years older, very pale in complexion, and his light grey eyes appeared almost devoid of colour behind rimless spectacles. He made a witty remark on what he considered the inefficiency of men and dogs in control, and his companion laughed again. Then one sheep, more observant than its mates, saw a gap in the hedge. This particular animal was near the front of the company and on the side close to the opening. It turned to face the gap, scampered through, and was immediately followed by the others, pushing and shoving in their haste. In less than a minute, the lane that had been crowded with sheep was completely devoid of them.

One of the horsemen trotted past the car and rode further on until he came to a gateway leading into the field where the flock had gone, and two graceful, feather-tailed Welsh sheep-dogs followed him. The other man dismounted and came to speak to the girl in the car.

"Hello, Jennifer, how are things?"

Jennifer returned his greeting with a smile and as she smiled she screwed up her eyes so that they disappeared for a second behind thick dark lashes. They showed themselves again as she said, "I heard you were back in Tremynach, Gerald." Then she introduced her companion as "Stephen Partridge, our museum curator." To Stephen she added, "Gerald's father is Alderman Jenkin Price."

The two men acknowledged the introduction rather stiffly, and Jennifer went on to explain that she and Stephen were looking for the house of a Mrs. Bowen-Jones.

"She's got some old prints of Tremynach that she wants to give to the museum, and we've come to collect them."

Gerald knew the house and offered to show them the way, but she asked if he ought not to help with the sheep.

"I'm so sorry we upset them."

"They'll be all right. Lew will manage them."

"I thought that was your farmer brother."

Gerald mounted his horse and told her to follow, so she drove slowly along the lane behind him.

Stephen remarked, "I suppose that is the prodigal son who has given up being prodigal and come to work in the Emporium since Edmond Price's death."

"Gerald hasn't been a prodigal son. He's been abroad exploring and studying wild animals. It's very good of him to give up doing what he wants and come home to help Alderman Price with the Emporium."

"That's a gold mine if ever there was one! But what about this brother Lew who came riding past us and looking so furious because we'd made his sheep panic? Why doesn't he leave his farming and turn shopkeeper so that Gerald does not have to be the sacrificial victim?"

"I've no idea," said Jennifer.

"They both look as dark as gipsies," went on Stephen. "Haven't I heard that Alderman Price married someone from a Spanish family who came to work in Tremynach years and years ago?"

"Yes, there was a colony of Spaniards in Bonwyllfa and descendants still live there, but Mrs. Price died when Gerald was quite young. He was in the same form as me at school. I don't know the rest of the family, except of course Alderman Price, and that is through him being a deacon at Aunt Marty's chapel. I haven't seen Gerald for ages until just now."

It was ten years, she reflected, since she and Gerald Price finished their courses at the university where, though she did not tell Stephen, they had been far more intimate than at school. Ten years ago, their secret love ripened, then withered away, shrivelled by conflicting desires and loyalties. This was an episode in Jennifer's life of which her own family was unaware, and which was probably unknown to Gerald's.

At the end of the lane, Gerald turned right, then a few minutes later he stopped in front of a solitary house.

"This must be the place," said Stephen. "You don't want to come with me, do you?"

"Not particularly. I'll wait in the car."

Jennifer noticed that Gerald had again dismounted and stood waiting, as though disposed for a chat. There was no reason why they should not be friends now he had returned to Tremynach. They had not quarrelled ten years ago. The love affair was a brief, mad, youthful episode, long dead and buried. Jennifer had no ill-feeling about it and she did not think Gerald had. As soon as he left the university he went abroad and they had not met since, but Jennifer heard scraps of local gossip about his adventurous life as the years sped by.

One of her aunts who went to the same chapel as Gerald's father would chat about Alderman Price's sons, especially the youngest one, but she did not know that Gerald and her niece had met at London University, still less that they had been in love. Recently there was a great deal of sympathy for Alderman Jenkin Price whose local nickname was Siencyn Emporium, Siencyn being the Welsh variant of Jenkin, while the Emporium was a large shop he owned. One of the sons, who was his father's right hand in the business, died suddenly after a comparatively minor operation.

One son was a missionary in Africa, another owned a farm in Breconshire, while Gerald, the youngest, was somewhere in the Arctic. He was supposed to be in Alaska collecting wild animals for zoos, then making charts of unknown coastal regions around the North Pole, then studying weather conditions in Greenland. Tremynach people thought it would be nice for his father if he got a job as "one of those Met boys" on the "telly" and came to work in London, or even Cardiff. After Edmund's death, there were remarks that he ought to do something like that and come nearer home, but no one expected him to go into the Emporium.

Jennifer was surprised to hear that Gerald had returned

to Tremynach and was trying to fill his brother's vacant place in the alderman's business. Only she could appreciate the enormity of the sacrifice he must be making to exchange his wandering, exploring life for a settled, uneventful existence in a South Wales town. She concluded he did this to please his father and her lips curled ironically as she listened to Aunty Marty's praise of such conduct. Jennifer was secretly recalling the cutting remarks once made by Gerald about herself in the rôle of devoted daughter.

Outwardly he had not altered in the least. His face still had that impish look and his almost black eyes were as penetrating as ever. They used to give her the sensation of having her innermost soul unveiled. Jennifer turned to Stephen who was fussing because he could not find Mrs. Bowen-Jones' letter in his brief-case, and she was relieved when he came across it and prepared to go to the house.

"I'll call you if the old girl has anything else of interest that she's prepared to give to the museum."

Jennifer nodded in agreement. She knew that Gerald was looking at her and she wondered if he thought she had altered. She wished she had taken the trouble to renew her make-up earlier that afternoon, for her nose must need powdering and her lips retouching. Gerald noticed that, also the too lavish eye-shadow, an addition to the make-up of ten years ago which he did not consider an improvement. Then Jennifer smiled again at him, and he remembered how her smile used to make him think of the sun shining on a meadow full of golden buttercups. As a schoolboy he felt there was a gaiety and radiance about Jennifer Evans which made her seem different from other girls.

It seemed strange to be standing in a Breconshire country lane, meeting her after such a long interval. The car was parked near a large elm and the grey of each branch merged into a confusion of green, the sophisticated deep green of late summer when even leaves appear conscious of the coming

change to autumn which will bring their own fall and decay.

Jennifer looked at the elm and thought how Gerald must have missed trees when he was living in the barren lands of the Arctic. Once, each instinctively knew what was passing in the other's mind. Now they were no longer able to read one another's thoughts.

"Stephen has been museum curator for nearly a year," remarked Jennifer. "I expect you heard, didn't you, that dear old A.T.N. died?"

Gerald said stiffly, "I gather Partridge has transformed the place."

"Yes, he's marvellous. Father is very pleased with all he has done."

Unlike his predecessors, Stephen certainly understood museum technique, but Jennifer often wished he would not grumble so much about their shortcomings. The late Mr. A. T. N. Jones had been very kind to her as a child and she found it painful when Stephen made sarcastic criticisms about him.

The Tomlinson Memorial Museum was founded in 1890 by Noah Tomlinson, owner of the Drysgoed ironworks, and great-grandfather of Jennifer, and it was this wealthy iron-master who financed the institution and appointed one of the clerks from his office as curator. From Posthumous Jones, the job passed to "Posty's" son, Abel Thomas Noah Jones, named after three successive owners of Drysgoed. A. T. N. Jones worked there until his death, which did not occur until he was well on in the eighties and really beyond the performance of his duties, but Jennifer's father had not the heart to force the old man to give up the work he loved. Jonathan Tomlinson Evans, now sole trustee and owner of the museum, was determined to have a qualified, trained curator after A. T. N. Jones. He appointed Stephen Partridge, M.A., F.M.A., then working in a large London museum. The salary had to be far bigger to attract a good man and, as the museum income did

not cover this annual increase, Jonathan Evans paid the extra out of his own pocket.

"Stephen is marvellous," repeated Jennifer. "He has done wonders in a short time."

She patted Gerald's horse who was seizing the chance to nibble at some lush-looking grass by the side of the road.

"Have you heard about the new development plan for the centre of the town?" he asked abruptly.

"Only a few vague rumours, but the Town Clerk rang up Daddy saying the Mayor wanted to see him about town changes, so we've been wondering if the museum building might be affected. Daddy has gone to the Town Hall this afternoon. Do you know any details?"

She guessed that Gerald did since his father was one of the most powerful members of the Tremynach Town Council. Her own father had remarked caustically, "Whatever is affected, Siencyn Emporium will see his shop isn't touched." When Jennifer wanted to know what redress they would have if the museum were threatened, Jonathan Evans said it would be useless to oppose the local authority, especially as the Tomlinsons had never owned the land on which the building stood.

"Unfortunately the land belongs to the Corporation, so if the museum has to come down I shall have no alternative but to accept the situation and get as much compensation as I can. If that doesn't cover the cost of buying some other building and adapting it as a museum, I don't know what I shall do. I could never afford to build."

"I'm sure the museum won't be touched. The town councillors are so proud of it. They talk about it as being one of Tremynach's assets."

"They may talk," said Jonathan Evans. "But they are annoyed they don't own it. They'd like to have it under their control—at least, Siencyn Emporium and his clique would—but if they ever do, it will be over my dead body, and I hope over yours, Jennifer. I look upon the museum as a sacred trust

from my grandfather. It belongs to our family and it must remain with our family."

Jennifer thought of her father's remarks as Gerald said, "Your museum is scheduled to be pulled down. All Tomlinson Street, West Street, and that part of High Street between Waterloo Street and Iron Lane, are to form a new shopping centre."

The Emporium was in High Street, but in the part below Iron Lane.

"From what I've heard, the Town Council is prepared to take over your museum, put up a new building on top of Abelstown Tip, and run it out of the rates, supplemented of course by Noah Tomlinson's museum fund. The income from that doesn't nearly cover the present cost of the place, does it? And your father can't keep on and on subsidising a museum that really ought to belong to the town."

"Abelstown Tip would be very out of the way. I don't think nearly as many people would visit the museum if that's where it was. They would have to climb up a great hill unless they had cars, and there's no bus route near." She did not like to say how certain she was that her father would never allow this cherished inheritance to pass from family to municipal ownership.

Jennifer had no regrets at having ended the love affair between Gerald and herself. For a short, mad, delirious period she did believe that she was in love with him, but that passed rapidly and she came down to earth. The price demanded by Gerald was too high. He wanted a wife who was willing to share his wandering life, someone who would be entirely his own, but Jennifer wanted to remain anchored in or near Tremynach and still be the intimate constant companion of her darling father.

Even now Gerald could not resist making a jibe at what he used to call her "~~daddy-complex~~". He saw Stephen Part-ridge saying good-afternoon to Mrs. Bowen-Jones at the front

door, so hurriedly seized the opportunity to give vent to the bitterness that still rankled, although, years ago, he had given up all thought of making Jennifer Evans his wife.

"Still enjoying your nice cosy existence as devoted daughter?"

Jennifer looked embarrassed. "Yes," she answered.

She might have said to Gerald, "What about you? You couldn't understand my father's need of me and why I had to put him first, but you've just given up the life you adore to help your father in a shop that I know you loathe."

But Jennifer Evans was fundamentally too kind-hearted to make any return thrust. She was about to change the subject when she saw Stephen approaching.

"Nice?" she enquired, glancing at the parcel under his arm.

"So-so," said Stephen rather indifferently. "A few may be useful to Mr. Evans for his book, but I'm positive we've already got most of them."

A general history of Tremynach had been written by Jonathan Evans and now he was working on an account of the four ironworks that, in the past, had made the town prosperous and famous. But the iron era had long been over. The smaller works closed, leaving only Drysgoed and Bonwylfa. Bonwylfa absorbed Drysgoed, but it too put out its furnaces before the nineteen-thirties.

Drysgoed was owned by a woman when it was sold to Bonwylfa, thus ending the great works started in the eighteenth century by Abel Tomlinson, and reigned over by Thomas Tomlinson, Noah Tomlinson, and finally Janet Tomlinson. Janet married the works cashier, Morris Evans, and he was sufficiently astute to foresee the coming decline of Tremynach's iron industry. The inland situation of the town made cost of shipping products very high, while local deposits of iron ore were practically exhausted. So Morris Evans persuaded his wife to sell while the going was good. The Bonwylfa Company

was anxious to get rid of a powerful rival and willing to pay a high price for the prosperous Drysgoed works, which were run for a few years and then closed. Their owners did not see so far ahead as Morris Evans. They were already importing iron ore from northern Spain but to them the future still seemed rosy.

Janet Evans had done well out of the deal. Money was all that concerned her, and she certainly was a wealthy woman for she had also inherited a considerable private fortune from her father, Noah Tomlinson. She did not die until the end of the Second World War and her only son, Jonathan Tomlinson Evans, was now living on income derived from the Tomlinson capital. He spent most of his time on local history research, for which he had a passion, and he managed the Tomlinson Memorial Museum, although the actual work was done by a paid curator assisted by Jonathan's daughter, Jennifer. Jennifer did not receive any salary for this, and she typed her father's books and helped him with his research.

After Jennifer and Stephen had gone, Gerald mounted his horse and rode slowly back to his brother's farm, wondering why he still felt the fascination of his former love. Ever since he had come back to live in Tremynach he had been thinking of their first encounter, and speculating what Jennifer Evans would be like after ten years' interval. He felt disappointed that instead of maturing she was still the "daddy's girl" he had known at the university. He used to tell her that she never came to grips with life, and this afternoon he could see she was unchanged.

"She'll wake up some day and find she's been a sleeping beauty who has slept too long. But that won't happen while she's so wrapped up in that father of hers."

Driving homewards, Jennifer would have welcomed the opportunity for an undisturbed mental recapitulation of her meeting with Gerald. Liking him without still being in love, it would have been pleasant to go over details of the past

hour, to have what her sister Dilys called a "ponder", but that was impossible with Stephen sitting beside her and talking about the visit to Mrs. Bowen-Jones.

Stephen was in one of his humorous moods and giving vent to scorn of the Welsh. The Tomlinsons of Drysgoed were English and, with the exception of Janet Tomlinson, they had taken English partners, so the only Welsh blood in Jennifer came from her grandfather, Morris Evans. Nevertheless, that, and the fact that she had spent most of her life in Wales, made her regard herself as belonging to the country and its people. She disliked Stephen's derisive remarks, but was afraid to say so in case he switched to another favourite subject of his, the story of his unsuccessful marriage.

He applied for the museum post at Tremynach because he wanted to escape from the matrimonial troubles that beset him in London. He was trying to get a divorce, but the legal machinery moved slowly and he seemed no nearer freedom than he had been a year ago. Jennifer wondered what would happen when he was no longer tied. Her aunts expected her to marry him then, and they took it for granted that Stephen would ask her to be the successor to his present wife. Jennifer doubted if he would want a second one. Neither did she think she could rouse enough enthusiasm in herself to accept him if he did. She liked Stephen in some ways. He would not demand so much from her as Gerald. However, she knew she was not and never could be in love with him, also she was too satisfied with her present mode of life to want to change, even to the extent of grafting on Stephen Partridge to that happy existence. Being her father's adored companion was all she wanted, and she found the society of Jonathan Evans far more attractive than any other.

Stephen was subject to moods of bad depression that Jennifer found quite beyond her comprehension. When he was in that state she had to listen to lamentations about the misery of his married life, how Melanie failed to understand his highly-

strung, sensitive temperament, how Melanie insisted on producing a family although she knew children got on his nerves. Stephen himself had been brought up in an institution because his parents died when he was a baby, and Jennifer thought anyone deprived of family life in childhood would be anxious to experience it through parenthood, but not Stephen Partidge.

He was grumbling because Mrs. Bowen-Jones talked so much.

Jennifer sighed. "I enjoy hearing people talk. It sort of puts one in the picture of their lives."

"Anyone can leave me out of a life picture," declared Stephen, which was very inconsistent as he loved talking about himself.

He went on to complain how Mrs. Bowen-Jones had bored him by showing uniform, medals, and sword, of her late husband, and, only by being quite definite in his refusal of tea had he managed to escape from the "annoying old trout" as soon as he did.

He was probably quite rude to the poor woman, thought Jennifer, feeling guilty that she had not gone with Stephen into the house, instead of staying to talk to Gerald. Her father was a man who disliked social chit-chat, but he would have had sufficient courtesy to accept Mrs. Bowen-Jones' hospitality. She must write an enthusiastic and very polite acknowledgment of the lady's donation to make up for Stephen's brusqueness. Jennifer usually sent the letters of thanks for gifts to the museum.

Stephen was asking her about Gerald Price's background and the early struggles of Alderman Price before he became owner of the Emporium. Jennifer was vague in her replies, not wanting to show that she had once been on terms of close friendship with Gerald. It was still more awkward when Stephen wanted to know why her father disliked the alderman.

She shrugged her shoulders and said, "Oh, just one of those

things!" Actually, she realised that the dislike sprung from jealousy, but did not want to admit—even to herself—that her beloved parent could show pettiness. Jonathan Evans would have liked to take a prominent part in local affairs, but had tried without success to get elected to the Town Council and was also disappointed at not becoming a magistrate. He was envious of such an important public figure as Alderman Jenkin Price, J.P.

The thought of her father and his interview that afternoon with Tremynach's mayor made Jennifer wonder what had happened while she was out with Stephen. To her the Tomlinson Memorial Museum was something fixed and permanent, as immovable as the Brecon Beacons, the high hills whose peaks were visible from the road on which she was driving. They would always be there, just as the museum ought always to remain in Tomlinson Street in the building which had been erected and endowed by the third ironmaster of Drysgood.

Stephen was telling her some fantastic tale about a famous scholar coming to the London museum where he once worked and being impressed with Stephen's brilliant identification of some archaeological specimen. Stephen loved presenting himself in glowing colours. Jennifer admired his abilities, but she had long realised that he was apt to exaggerate them. However, she preferred listening to these "tall" stories rather than to his moans about the faults of Melanie, his wife.

They reached Tremynach and all her attention was absorbed in threading her way through traffic in the busy High Street. There was great prosperity again in this South Wales town, although there had been years of tragedy with the townsfolk enduring grim poverty after the decline of the iron trade. Morris Evans had been right in his predictions when he urged his wife to sell Drysgood. Just before the Second World War, the government began to sponsor new factories in the district, and now Tremynach was again a boom town, turning out sportswear, musical instruments, clocks, and plastic goods. All

that remained of the old heavy industry days were two working collieries, ruins of abandoned mines, deserted ironworks, and the black slag heaps known as "tips" that still disfigured the landscape.

Jennifer parked the car on a piece of waste ground, recently made available for this purpose, after the clearance of four rows of insanitary dwellings that had been rushed up to accommodate workmen coming to the town a century ago. In front was the river, usually a murky flow but now silvery in the bright afternoon sunlight, while beyond, a new housing estate stretched up the hillside, the pillar-box red roofs ending abruptly and giving place to green grass, grey rocks, and dark patches where bushes grew. The mauvish contours of hilltop stood out sharply, against a clear azure sky in which only an occasional cloud could be seen. Some days the hills were hidden by mist, sometimes they appeared to be miles away from the town, but this afternoon they seemed very close. This was a sign of rain said the local old folk.

Stephen was silent as they walked along Tomlinson Street. Jennifer was glad he knew nothing, as yet, about this rumoured development plan, so did not harass him with her views and speculations about it. She was feeling on edge, anxious to hear the result of her father's interview with the Mayor, and hoping fervently that the museum building was not threatened with demolition. She loved every stone and brick of her ancestor's creation.

Chapter Two

BUILT IN 1890, the Tomlinson Memorial Museum looked from the outside like an unusually large noneonformist chapel of that period, except for its classical porch. The elaborately decorated gates and railings, separating it from the street pavement, had been made in the Drysgoed works and were a source of great pride to Noah Tomlinson. The architect of the building must have lacked a sense of proportion, or perhaps he was overruled by his employer, for the plaque above the porch was so enormous that it gave the structure a top heavy effect. It bore the inscription TOMLINSON MEMORIAL MUSEUM, date, and name of founder. •

Immediately inside was a narrow, oblong lobby, flanked by a flight of steps at each end, while, opposite the front door and dominating this entrance hall, was a large, long counter. Here an attendant, either the caretaker or his wife, controlled entrance and exit to exhibition galleries and also sold guides. Mrs. Thomas was there this afternoon and Stephen walked past her and upstairs without stopping, but Jennifer waited a few minutes to chat about the visit to Mrs. Bowen-Jones. Mrs. Thomas was only mildly interested in such an incident and another time would have turned the conversation to some television programme, but her husband had just heard rumours about the town planning scheme and she was worried about

the fate of the museum, especially his job. Jennifer said hopefully that she was sure everything would be all right.

She passed through the turnstile into the large room called Ceramics and Eastern Antiquities gallery, which contained several cases of porcelain and a few of pottery, besides an ill-assorted assembly of weapons, ornaments, and objects from different parts of the world. Some Egyptian mummies, given by Sir Clive Lucas, a relative by marriage of Aunt Marty, had to be displayed in a prominent place or Jonathan Evans would have been accused by his sister of disrespect to her late husband's memory. Not that Sir Clive had thought of Ernest Davies when he gave the mummies. These exhibits were popular with visitors but somehow roused an extraordinary antipathy in Stephen who would have banished them to a store-room if his employer had allowed him.

Jennifer went through the Natural History section, passing her childish favourite, a stuffed walrus on whose back Mr. A. T. N. Jones used to let her climb. There was a broad staircase turning to the right and giving access to the Wales and Tremynach galleries, but, immediately at the top of the staircase, was a door marked PRIVATE. She opened it and found her father in a room that was originally intended as a meeting-place for the museum committee, but never used as such because no committee was formed. He was standing by the window, looking out, and he turned as she came in.

Jonathan Tomlinson Evans was almost sixty, thin and straight in figure, with dark hair beginning to turn grey. Features and colouring were akin to those of his daughter, but, since the death of his wife and discovery of her unfaithfulness to him, there was a sombre air about Jonathan which was very different from Jennifer's charming gaiety. In repose he had the taut expression of a man who inwardly subjects himself to a rigid discipline, while a somewhat arrogant air in the way he tilted his head and squared his shoulders indicated his pride in being descended from the ironmasters of Drysgoed.

"What happened, Daddy?" asked Jennifer affectionately.

Before he spoke she could tell he was very upset, very worried, and very angry. At the expression of sympathy in her eyes, Jonathan's face relaxed a little and he gave that special half-smile reserved only for his precious daughter.

"They intend to take the land, of course," he said, referring to Tremynach Corporation. Then he repeated details of the new development plan. "It will take more than a year, so I've got several months at least to make arrangements for rehousing the museum exhibits before this building is pulled down—with the rest of Tomlinson Street."

"Are you sure we can't go to law about it?"

"There's nothing we can do. I had a talk with Rees Williams." He was Jonathan's solicitor. "No, my darling, I shall have to accept the compensation offered and find another home for our museum." He paused for a minute and then said, "I'm seriously considering using part of Derwen."

"Derwen, Daddy!"

This was the large showy house built by the second owner of Drysgoed. The first Tomlinson lived close to the ironworks, but his son turned that old house into offices and built a far grander residence further away. Thomas Tomlinson also spent enormous sums of money in laying out the grounds while his successor, Noah Tomlinson, lived at Derwen in almost palatial splendour. Under Janet and Morris Evans that splendour lessened considerably owing to income reduction and changed social conditions brought about by a world war, but even in the nineteen-twenties and thirties living was luxurious and dignified. The Second World War and Janet Evans' death brought about much bigger changes to which Jonathan and his two sisters had to adapt themselves. The family living there now consisted of . . . Jonathan Evans, his daughter Jennifer, and his two sisters, Mrs. Davies and Mrs. Holmes.

"As it is we only use about a quarter of the house," said Jonathan, and this was indeed true. The large drawing-room,

huge dining-room, and even bigger library, had become mere state apartments, cleaned at regular intervals by the daily helps, but unlived in and dead. Upstairs several of the bedrooms had not been slept in for years. There was a disused nursery and schoolroom wing, and, on the third floor, five attics where once servants had their sleeping quarters.

Jonathan proceeded to outline his plan for turning most of the house into a museum and Jennifer listened, hesitating to draw her father's attention to the obstacle that would permanently block such a scheme.

"Being a little out of town would not matter in this case," he continued. "People will always come to visit a museum in beautiful surroundings."

Certainly Derwen had not the disadvantage of Abelstown Tip, thought Jennifer. It was on a bus route.

Aloud she said, "You know, Daddy, the aunts won't agree to such a change."

Jonathan frowned. He tucked his fingers into the armholes of his waistcoat, a habit that Jennifer knew denoted annoyance. She sensed he was secretly afraid his sisters might oppose the plan. However, he began to minimise difficulties.

"Marty will understand after I have explained the necessity to her. As for Rhoda, I shall not stand any nonsense from her. After all, they are both living at my expense, and I'm not asking them to leave Derwen, only to have other rooms in the house. If the morning-room is essential to their happiness we can keep that for family use."

The morning-room was used as a lounge by the present occupants of Derwen, while a dark dingy room on the other side of the hall, once a gun room, was where they had meals. It was nearer the kitchens and more convenient than the great dining-room.

"They must agree," said Jonathan, still referring to his sisters.

"It's too bad of the Town Council to take our building.

Why can't they leave the museum as it is, even if they do put up new shops in Tomlinson Street?"

"Do you really think this Victorian building would harmonise with modern shop fronts?" asked her father, and Jennifer had to admit the result would be incongruous.

She handed Jonathan the parcel of prints from Mrs. Bowen-Jones, but though he sat down at his desk and examined them, it was in an aimless, irritable way, as though something else was on his mind. He gave a cursory glance at each print, making remarks like, "We've got this," "Yes, this might be useful," came to the end, pushed the pile aside, and began to unburden himself.

"That present Mayor is quite a decent fellow in many ways, but the audacity of him and the rest of that Council lot staggers me."

Jennifer enquired why, although from what Gerald Price had told her, she suspected there was an offer for the museum to pass to corporation ownership.

"He actually had the nerve to suggest that I gave my ancestor's museum to the town and let the town fathers manage it. He hinted I might find it a heavy financial burden and said the Council would levy an extra rate to supplement the trust fund income. Did you ever hear such impertinence?"

"What did you say to that, Daddy?"

"That such a proposition was entirely unacceptable," declared Jonathan Evans in a voice that reverberated with fury, in spite of the formal language. "The Mayor seemed to think I would welcome the offer and talked about a new building on Abelstown Tip. Good heavens! I was very short with him and took my leave. He could see I was angry. Of course, that Siencyn Emporium is behind all this. He fancies himself as Chairman and the big I AM of a municipal museum committee. Unscrupulous climber that he is!" Jonathan's lips were set in a tight line and his eyes flashed as he spoke of Alderman Price.

Jennifer forced herself to make a sympathetic comment. She liked the alderman, the little she knew of him. She met him occasionally when she went to social functions at Aunt Marty's chapel.

It did not occur to her though to mention the afternoon's meeting with Gerald Price to her father. She never did talk about her doings, simply because she knew he was not interested, and he would certainly have shown his boredom if she had begun to describe the incident with the sheep. Jonathan was devoted to his charming, sweet-natured Jennifer, and almost entirely dependent on her for companionship and affection, but he was too self-centred to concern himself about her life save where it merged with his own. Not that Jennifer minded. She adored her father and thought him perfect in every respect.

It never crossed Jonathan's mind that Jennifer had ever had any private life. He knew nothing about the love affair, not even that she and Gerald Price studied at the same college in London University. Neither had he any idea that at present his sisters were hoping she would marry Stephen Partridge once the latter obtained a divorce from his wife. To lose Jennifer to a husband was something Jonathan never dared to contemplate when she was younger. Now she was in the thirties he took it for granted she would not marry.

Jennifer left the typing of a letter of thanks to Mrs. Bowen-Jones until tomorrow as her father was impatient to leave the museum. She knew why. He was eager to get home and have a talk with her Aunt Marty before supper, while the other sister, Rhoda, was busy in the kitchen, getting the evening meal ready.

Marty, or Martha Davies was widowed after a few years of marriage, and returned to live at Derwen then. She was twelve years older than her brother, and still a pretty woman though now over seventy. She loved dress. Even more, she loved the local distinction of being known as Mrs. Davies Derwen,

thus singled out from innumerable other Mrs. Davieses in Tremynach, and she was as proud as Jonathan Evans of being a descendant of the Drysgoed Tomlinsons. But to Marty, Derwen was the living symbol of their family status, not the Tomlinson Memorial Museum.

Rhoda Holmes, the other sister, was seven years younger than Marty. Rhoda was tall, dark, and intense-looking, with a brilliant smile when she cared to evoke it, but usually she was like a rumbling volcano, discontented with her present lot and doing nothing to remedy it. She could have left Derwen years ago and resumed the social work which she gave up to help to nurse her dying mother. Her husband died in the nineteen-thirties and, like Marty, she was childless. Like Marty, she had become a permanent fixture at Derwen. It would be difficult to find a job again after such a long interval, although until two years ago she had talked of leaving, and she still grumbled about the boredom of life in Tremynach. Two years ago, she started to breed poodles and was finding it quite profitable. Not that she would admit she did more than cover the cost of keeping the dogs.

A seemingly gentle manner can be misleading, as was the case with Marty, who really ruled Jonathan, like her mother had done. Jennifer loved both aunts, but summing up their characters, she knew that though Aunt Rhoda might express vehement scorn of her father's plan for moving the museum to Derwen, yet it was Aunt Marty's opinion that would count, and Marty was certain to see the idea was still-born.

As soon as they sat down to supper it was obvious what was going to happen, thought Jennifer. Marty began to tell Rhoda how Jonathan wanted to "revolutionise our lives" and Rhoda, who seldom took the trouble to hide her feelings where her brother was concerned, declared bluntly that she had never heard of anything so ridiculous. She could be very tactful and diplomatic when she liked, but she did not often show these qualities in the bosom of her family, and now she stormed

at Jonathan for wasting time and money in bothering with "that blessed museum."

"Let the whole show pack up when the Tomlinson Street building comes down," she urged. "You can't run it properly now the income has shrunk. It may have been enough in old Noah Tomlinson's day, but it isn't much now, and I think you're a fool to try and preserve an archaic affair."

"I resent you saying the museum isn't run properly," said Jonathan.

Marty intervened. Rhoda did not mean that. Of course the museum was looking "most attractive" under the care of "that nice clever Stephen Partridge", and she smiled across the table at Jennifer.

"I thought I would like to look at the Egyptian things dear Clive gave, so I popped in the museum one day last week, but I quite forgot to tell you. I know I mentioned it to Mrs. J. D. at chapel on Sunday because Alderman Price was with us, and he said it was second to none, and Mrs. J. D. said it was an absolute boon to the town."

By upbringing the Evans family belonged to church, although Jonathan and Rhoda had long ceased to have any connection with organised religion, and Marty, since her marriage, went to a nonconformist chapel. The minister of the one she attended in Tremynach was a certain Reverend Jesse Deiniol Jones, he and his wife being known as the Reverend J. D. and Mrs. J. D. Strangely enough, Jonathan, who disliked ministers of religion in general, was friendly with this one. They shared the same enthusiasm for local history.

"Second to none—that's a damned silly phrase!" exclaimed Rhoda.

Jonathan was frowning at the allusion to Alderman Price, and Rhoda's remark about the inadequacy of the museum income also rankled.

She continued to harp on this theme. "I know Stephen Partridge is a trained curator and has good qualifications, but

why should you have to pay his salary out of your own pocket? Ask the Town Council to manage the ruddy show and make up such extras from the rates. God' knows Tremynach rate-payers disgorge enough as it is, so as far as I can see, a little more extravagance is neither here nor there."

"You can't complain about the town rates when you don't make any contribution towards them," was Jonathan's scornful rejoinder.

"That's right, keep on rubbing it in that, Marty and I allow you to pay the overheads at Derwen. It just happens that we are poor widows, existing on small fixed incomes, and Mother never cared a tinker's cuss about us when she made her will. Not that I've ever minded her leaving all the Tomlinson money to you, Jonathan. You needn't think that. But you needn't begrudge your poverty-stricken sisters a roof over their heads, or the small amount of food they consume."

"There won't be a roof over our heads if the Tomlinson Memorial Museum has to be brought to Derwen," sighed Marty.

For the moment, Jonathan ignored his elder sister and concentrated on Rhoda.

"I'm not begrudging you food or shelter, and you won't lose either through the museum coming here. Can't you see what an attraction Derwen and its grounds will be, as well as the collections? Conversion won't cost much, and I can charge entrance fees that will help . . ."

"Why don't you charge for admission now?"

"It never has been done and I can't start such an innovation in the present building, but it would be different here. People would be willing to pay to see Derwen."

"I'm sure they would," said Marty with a shudder. "And I'm sure it wouldn't be dear Granpa Tomlinson's wish that Rhoda and I should be turned out of our home in our old age. I've counted on living here until the time comes for me to be carried out in my coffin."

"I am not turning you and Rhoda out of your home. I only want to put the museum collections in parts of the house we never use and, well, into our present bedrooms. I'm merely asking you to move to bedrooms on the top floor."

"Not the attics!" Marty shuddered.

"What's wrong with the attics? They are perfectly habitable."

"I've never slept in an attic and I simply cannot start at my time of life. Neither can I endure strangers swarming all over the house, morning, noon, and night. No, Jonathan, if you insist on turning Derwen into a museum, you will force me to leave. I expect I shall have to end my days in Preswylfa." This was a large house in Tremynach that the Corporation had bought and now used for the accommodation of aged women.

"Hand over the whole show to the Town Council," advised Rhoda. "Let them find a place for the museum collections, but keep your home as it is."

Jonathan pushed back his plate and got up.

"Whatever happens, I shall not turn the museum over to the Town Council, and that is final."

"Don't go, Jonathan dear. Wait for coffee."

But Jonathan walked out of the room. Rhoda went to fetch coffee from the kitchen and, as Jennifer cleared dishes, Marty sat grumbling.

"Really, darling, I do think your father is being most inconsiderate and unkind."

"He is very worried about the museum, Auntie. It does mean a tremendous lot to him."

"I should have thought his sisters' happiness ought to count more than any museum. No, darling, don't tell me I'm mistaken because I know better. Jonathan has always been fanatical about that place. Personally, I can't imagine where I shall lay my head if I am compelled to leave Derwen. It will be a dreadful upheaval at my age."

Marty usually played down her age, saying she could not

believe she was in the seventies, for she didn't feel a day over fifty, but now she saw herself in the autumn of life, with health and vigour fast waning.

"Of course Daddy doesn't want you to leave Derwen."

"Darling, I cannot possibly stay if he brings that museum here. Imagine crowds roaming over our lovely house, and no peace! I could not stand it. If Jonathan does such a thing, as I told him just now, I shall leave. Where I can lay my head is another matter. If Olwen had not let her upstairs flat I could have sought refuge there, but those tenants have taken it on a long lease."

Marty's greatest friend, Mrs. Olwen Williams and mother of Jonathan's solicitor, had recently turned her house into two flats, had let the upper one and was living in the lower herself.

"I shan't be Mrs. Davies Derwen if I have to live somewhere else," continued Marty. She loved being known as that and the thought of dropping the title was a bitter blow.

Rhoda came back with coffee and was followed by three white poodles. Jonathan disliked dogs so they were not allowed in a room where he was. They belonged to the variety of poodle known as toy, but were of different heights and looked rather comical as they stood in a row. The middle-sized one, Sparkle, who had recently produced a litter of puppies, radiated smugness and self-satisfaction with her achievement. Her two companions, Mimi and Bambi, were annoyed by their own absence of family and were jealous of Sparkle's motherhood.

"Put my coffee and Jonathan's on a tray. I shall drink mine in the morning-room with him."

"For goodness sake, talk some sense into him." Rhoda was well aware that Marty's influence over her brother was far stronger than hers.

It was obvious that was Marty's intention and Jennifer thought sadly of her poor father being forced by sisterly pressure to give up his cherished plan, but there was nothing she

could do. Aunt Marty was determined that the museum should not come to Derwen, and her wishes would prevail.

Left alone with the other aunt, Jennifer said she did not see why both minded so much.

"Derwen would be a lovely setting for the museum."

"Oh, I don't mind." Rhoda's tone belied this statement. "I'm fed up with Tremynach as it is and I think I shall get rid of the dogs and look for a job—in London, of course. I know I'm wasting my life—what there is left of it."

Jennifer was used to these grumblings and merely waited for the usual tirade on being frustrated, having no one who really cared, and the difference if Ted, her husband, were still alive, but Rhoda suddenly switched the conversation to the subject of Stephen Partridge and asked how his divorce was progressing.

"His lawyer in London is working on it."

"Seems to be taking a damned long time." Rhoda looked earnestly at her niece. She was very fond of Jennifer. "You know, my dear, you ought to exert yourself a bit more over Stephen. You're much too casual and easy-going. Make him keen to marry you. Then he'll hurry up and get free from that wife. The trouble with you, Jennifer, is that you're lazy as regards men. You're an attractive girl and you ought to have been snapped up years ago. Look at Dilys marrying David when she was twenty, and here you are still single at thirty-two."

Rhoda frequently made attempts to "mother" her niece without success. Attached as Jennifer was to both aunts, she did not confide in them, nor in anyone else for that matter. When, up to the age of eight, you have a Mother who is not interested in you and makes it plain she regards you as a nuisance, the habit of making confidences is not formed. Jennifer's aunts, as well as her father, were ignorant of the abortive love affair with Gerald Price.

The blame for Jennifer's spinsterhood, according to Rhoda,

lay with Jonathan. He absorbed his daughter completely and did not encourage her to make friends of her own age. Instead of taking a proper job, he allowed her to stay at home and work for nothing at the museum.

She wound up with, "You really must snap out of this turtle-dove existence, always running round with your father. Stephen Partridge is an intelligent, presentable man. You would be very happy with him."

"I'm not in love with Stephen."

"You can't indulge in romantic notions at your age," said Rhoda. "Anyway, there's always motherhood to fall back on, unless you happen to be unlucky like me. I wish to God that Ted and I had had children. We wanted them but they just didn't come. I shouldn't be so lonely now if I had a son or daughter to live for."

"Stephen doesn't like children. That's one of the reasons why he and his wife separated. He gets queer horrors of things, and children are—well, he seems to loathe them. He says so. He won't bother with school classes who come to the museum and I have to take the parties round. Well, that wouldn't suit me in a marriage, Auntie. I would want to have a family."

Rhoda had nothing to say in reply to this. However, she found another argument in favour of Jennifer's marriage with Stephen.

"You're silly to throw away the chance you've got with him. Supposing your father brought a second wife here. You'd wish you'd got a husband and home of your own then."

The absurdity of such a suggestion made Jennifer laugh, which annoyed Rhoda who remarked acidly that the majority of widowers did remarry, and cited Jonathan's solicitor, Mr. Rees Williams, as an instance.

"That's different," said Jennifer. "Nothing went wrong with his first marriage. He was lonely when his wife died and he happened to meet another woman he liked, but Daddy will never forget how my mother was unfaithful and took a lover

I'm sure he won't be able to trust another woman—well, with us, who are part of his family, it's different. Oh, you must see, he isn't interested in women, not in that way! He's been so disillusioned by my mother."

"Disillusionment disappears when a clever siren comes on the scene."

"Nonsense, Aunt Rhoda! I'm absolutely positive nothing like that will ever happen. Daddy won't marry again."

Chapter Three

MARTY'S DISTRESS, mingled with threats to leave Derwen, soon wore down any lingering resistance of Jonathan's. He promised her he would give up the idea of moving the Tomlinson Memorial Museum to Derwen and would find somewhere else to house its collections. Bitterly disappointed and anxious to be alone so that he could think over his problem before discussing it again with Jennifer, he left Marty to watch television, went into the hall and through a side door that gave access to a terrace. This surrounded three sides of the house and from it Jonathan looked down at the lawn below. There was still light at that time of the evening in early September.

A flight of steps led to a broad path by the side of the huge lawn and, following it, he came to the old oak tree that gave Derwen its name, the Welsh word for oak being *derwen*. The tree always fascinated him. Great gnarled swellings disfigured the massive trunk and the twisted crooked branches spread out horizontally instead of reaching skywards. Before any house was built the land was covered with woodland. Now only this single oak remained and it stood, like a powerful spirit, eternally defying the human race that had destroyed its companions.

Trees were cut down ruthlessly in the Tremynach valley

during the early days of forging iron, until coal was burnt in the furnaces instead of wood, and it was a marvel that this oak remained standing when the rest of the grove had perished. To Jonathan, it was a symbol, like the museum, of the great Tomlinson ironmasters of Drysgoed. The old works were a conglomeration of miserable ruins and now the museum building was doomed, but he looked up at the tree and pledged himself to ensure the continuation of that institution founded by his ancestor for the benefit of Tremynach.

Tomorrow, thought Jonathan, he must follow up a suggestion of his solicitor's about a chapel that would be coming into the market for sale. It was in the centre of the town and almost deserted as a place of worship. Presumably, the price for it would not be very high. That was important, since he could not use Noah Tomlinson's fund for any purpose except the running of the museum, so, for a new building, he would have to depend on whatever compensation the Corporation gave on the old one, and make up any extra himself. He could not afford to do the latter.

Jonathan had inherited from his mother the entire Tomlinson estate but two world wars, death duties, and taxes, had reduced the income enormously from what it was when the Drysgoed ironworks were sold. True, after Janet Evans' death, Jonathan gave up his job and lived on his means, but money was becoming more of a problem every year. He was determined not to realise any capital. He wanted to hand on that intact to Jennifer after his own death.

One of Janet Evans' ambitions for her only son had been a brilliant career in the diplomatic service, which she imagined would bring him into contact with aristocratic, even royal, circles, but he never got further than a routine post in London. His superiors considered him too remote and reserved to fit in with a community abroad. Someone who was uninterested in his fellow men was not going to have much success as a negotiator. On the other hand, Jonathan Evans was clever,

reliable, and a keen historian, so in this London post he was found to be useful and there he stayed. Lack of further promotion did not worry him. He had plenty of time to do the historical research he loved and his wife was content with their life in London.

Janet Evans was delighted when Jonathan became engaged to Vera Lorimer, whose father was supposed to have been a colonel in the Indian Army and whose mother claimed kinship with two peers of the realm. "Blood, brains, and beauty, are the three things I wanted for my son, and he has all three in Vera," declared Mrs. Evans.

The blue blood in the bride's veins was doubtful, but she was shrewd and she was beautiful. Jonathan worshipped her. Their nine years of married life were halcyon days for him and were only brought to an end by Vera's death in an air raid and, worse still, the terrible discovery that she had had a lover for at least two years previously. The shock of Vera's unfaithfulness was the most overwhelming blow Jonathan could have had and he tried to tear her very memory out of his soul. He knew the second child, born six months before her death, must be her lover's, not as he had thought, his, and though pride forced him to bring up Dilys with the surname of Evans, he secretly resented her existence. Jennifer, the elder girl, he loved intensely. She was his daughter and she became the very light of his life, while other people merely formed a background of relatives and non-relatives. Jonathan was on what might be called friendly terms with two men, Rees Williams his solicitor and the Reverend Jesse Deiniol Jones, but even with them he was distant and reserved.

He returned to Tremynach and lived at Derwen after his mother died, but he could not feel he was a success in his home town or accepted by its inhabitants. And he would have liked local prestige and fame. As it was, he failed to get on the Town Council or become a magistrate, and though his *History of Tremynach* was acknowledged to be an erudite, clever work,

yet it was criticised as ponderous and dull. Certainly it had not brought him the renown and popularity he wanted. Now he was collecting material for a second book that was to cover the rise and decline of the town's ironworks. He had written a few chapters and was dissatisfied with them, for they seemed to lack vitality and give no feeling to the dramatic story he was endeavouring to unfold. Jennifer said they were splendid, but, as Jonathan reflected sadly, she always praised everything he wrote.

"I'm afraid you look at me through rose-coloured spectacles, darling," he once told her.

Jennifer's ardent devotion was something that Jonathan valued immensely, but he did wish sometimes that this adored daughter did not judge his efforts with such unqualified appreciation. During his married life he wrote a good deal in connection with English history, and then Vera was his critic. She was a severe, at times devastating critic, and would read his notes and first drafts, subjecting them to her discerning analytical judgement, thus helping him to produce first-class work. Under her stimulation, he made the dull bones of history come to life, something he knew he was failing to do now.

Since the ghastly discovery following his wife's death, Jonathan struggled to banish all thoughts of the partner who had been unfaithful to him. He had worshipped Vera, body and soul, and the knowledge of her betrayal roused such bitter hate that he wanted to cease to think about her. But it was impossible to forget entirely the woman who had once meant everything to him. The sun, the moon, and the stars . . . yes, suddenly, he would have a vision of her lovely pale face with those large grey-green eyes, and he would hear her faintly petulant voice saying, like the refrain of a once well-known song, "Oh, Johnny!" Johnny was her secret pet name for him, known to no one but themselves. To the rest of the world he was, and always would be, Jonathan. •

Before he had time next morning to ring up his solicitor for

further information about the chapel building that might shortly be for sale, reporters were calling at the museum to see him. Jonathan refused to give any interviews or to express his views on the re-development scheme although news of it was spreading through Tremynach with the swiftness of a forest fire. Tension mounted rapidly and for several days there was an atmosphere of general excitement.

"A much-needed innovation," ran the official statement made by the Mayor. "Rebirth of our town," was the heading splashed across the local newspaper's front page, and its leading article explained that plans of the new shopping centre could be seen at the Town Hall, also how buildings scheduled for demolition would be acquired by the Town Council under compulsory purchase powers. Agitated shopkeepers besieged the Town Hall with enquiries and came away to discuss and criticise further.

But in a few days, Tremynach townspeople realised that Tomlinson Street, West Street, and the particular section of High Street, were not going to be razed to the ground for many months at least, so excitement gradually died away and the town returned to normal. However, Jonathan Evans' problem of the museum's future still remained unsolved.

He told Jennifer in private about Nebo Chapel and how it was shortly to be closed as a place of worship because its congregation had dwindled to a mere handful of people. Rees Williams said one of the trustees had told him the building would then be sold, and, as it was in a central position, yet in a part of the High Street unaffected by the new planning scheme, it seemed very suitable. Jonathan obtained the key one morning and took Jennifer to view it with him.

"We'll see if it can be adapted as a museum, but not a word to Partridge. He is so foolish, talking about my building some palatial place. Such an impractical young man!"

Stephen's view was that money spent on any conversion would be a waste. In vain, Jennifer emphasised the fact that

funds did not allow her father to put up a new building. Stephen's reply to that was that the Town Council was willing to take over the museum and why not let it go? He looked upon a local authority as a goose that laid golden eggs.

Even on a bright September day, Nebo appeared chill and desolate, as though every pew, were crying out that the glory had departed. First opened over a hundred years ago, its congregations were enormous, like those in chapels all over Wales, but so few now attended its services that the position was hopeless. Soon this chapel that had witnessed so much of Tremynach's history and had existed through the golden age of Welsh nonconformity, this would be closed for ever as a place of worship.

Paint peeling off the walls stressed the atmosphere of doomed decay. Pulpit, pews, tables and chairs, especially those in the deacons' enclosure, the "Seiat Fawr", were of varnished wood and used to be highly polished until they shone like glass, but were now dull and slightly dusty. Brass handles on pew doors no longer gleamed as in former prosperous days. In the centre of the lofty ceiling, a huge plaster rose maintained its dignity as though still the chapel's very heart, while thin ornamental iron pillars supporting the gallery bore witness to the once-paramount industry of Tremynach.

"It is depressing, Daddy," remarked Jennifer.

"Any place looks dreary when it is on the downward grade."

Jonathan pointed out the large area of floor space and how a false floor could cover the gallery well, thus making an upstairs exhibition hall in addition to the one downstairs. Then they went into the adjoining Sunday school where there were several rooms, large and small.

"With a good architect to plan the conversion, this could be made into quite a suitable museum. I can't think of anywhere better." Jonathan did not say the words, now Derwen is not to be used, but Jennifer knew that was what her father

was thinking as he sighed, then began rapidly to talk of giving his solicitor authority to approach the trustees. The price figure Mr. Rees Williams had been given would be partly covered though not entirely, by the amount received as compensation for the Tomlinson Street building.

"I think I had better tell Rees to go ahead. He wants me to secure the place before anyone else is interested."

"Why, do you think anyone else might be?"

Jennifer was surprised at this, but her father said his friend, like all solicitors, looked for possible hazards.

"Rees has got the notion that people who have offices above shops in Tomlinson and the other streets may start to look for new accommodation."

"This chapel is far too large for offices."

"Of course," agreed Jonathan. "But you know what Rees is! He always wants to make certain of a thing, and I suppose I had better let him open negotiations with the trustees. Now keep all this secret, darling. Marty and Rhoda aren't interested, and it is no business of Partridge's at present. He can carry on with his silly dreams regarding skyscraper buildings until I have actually bought this chapel. Even then, I don't want his advice about replanning it. I shall have a proper architect to decide how the conversion can be made. Well, it is nice to feel we've got a home for the Tomlinson Memorial Museum, isn't it?"

Jennifer thought it must be the influence of the doomed chapel that weighed upon her as they left, but somehow she could not visualise Nebo metamorphosed into an attractive museum. As she and Jonathan walked back to Tomlinson Street, he told her of another idea that had occurred to him, a possible source of financial help towards the cost of conversion and move. He had a second cousin, a Lord Meadows, who was well-known for his philanthropy, his influence in charitable circles, and also his interest in cultural activities. Jonathan thought this relative might give a donation to the museum,

or put him in touch with some "body"—Jonathan was rather vague, but he thought there were "bodies" who gave grants to institutions devoted to the spread of learning. It was unfortunate that Lord Meadows was a cousin on the Evans, not Tomlinson, side of the family, or there might have been a strong case for him taking an interest in the preservation of the Tomlinson Memorial Museum.

"I'm very much afraid I shall require more for moving the museum than I'm likely to get in compensation, but my own income is stretched to its limits and I will not touch my capital. That is to be kept for you to inherit when I'm dead."

"Oh, Daddy, don't mention such a horrible thing! I hope I shall be an old lady—well on in the seventies, before that happens."

"I don't think, darling, that you can expect me to live to be a hundred," and Jonathan smiled, that special half-smile.

Life without him was something she did not want to contemplate. Her father meant more to her than anyone else, and always would. It was because of her love for him that she refused to marry Gerald Price. For a very short time, she thought she did care for Gerald, then she faced the reality of what marriage to him would mean and how he would come between her darling father and herself. Now she did not even want a husband like Stephen Partridge, whose demands for companionship would not be so exacting as Gerald. Stephen was always saying how he liked solitude, but, try as she would, Jennifer could not arouse in herself much enthusiasm for marriage with Stephen. Why should she when she found such happiness in being her father's supreme joy and pet? There was no comparison between the two!

Stephen was nice in some ways. He was clever and witty and she admired his skill as a curator. On the other hand, she was baffled by the depression which overwhelmed him at times, and she also disliked his sarcastic contempt of people

like the former curator, the late Mr. Abel Thomas Noah Jones.

"Look at this remarkable compilation for a case label. TEN NATIVE ORNAMENTS. Can you imagine anything less informative? I suppose old A. T. N. thought it very lucid and enlightening."

He said this one afternoon as he showed her a box of ornaments, with label, that he had found in a storeroom. Jennifer rushed to the defence of his predecessor.

"They must have been given to the museum without explanation about country of origin, and I expect Mr. Jones couldn't discover any details."

"So neither you nor I nor any visitor can know either. Makes me think of that story about Robert Browning when he said only God and he knew what a certain poem meant, and now he had forgotten."

"I don't get the connection," said Jennifer. "Is there a date when the ornaments were given? It must have been ages ago because I can remember seeing them upstairs when I was quite small. I expect the gift was made before Mr. Jones became curator, and if he couldn't find out . . ."

"The label isn't printed like his later efforts are, but written in his distinguished hand. Such a brilliant flash of inspiration to put the word native! Might be native to Britain or the South Sea Islands. A. T. N. was the type of so-called curator who would label Venus de Milo as STATUE OF A WOMAN."

"Mr. A. T. N. Jones hadn't the museum qualifications or the training that you have."

"Quite obvious, or he wouldn't have turned out such stupid useless labels."

"Oh, be fair, Stephen! If he didn't have the information about an exhibit, how could he convey it to the public?"

"There are such things as reference books, both here and at the public library. Come on, Jennifer, you know the trouble I take to get facts correct, even when I am not an expert on

the subject, like natural history. I may only be an art man, but I make sure any scientific data is a hundred per cent accurate. No one ever catches me out over an exhibit wrongly or inadequately labelled."

So boasted Stephen, yet this was exactly what Gerald Price did.

Jennifer was shopping in the High Street, looking for a new pair of shoes, something she usually bought in the shoe department of the Emporium, but she was reluctant to go there in case she met Gerald. She was afraid that if he saw her in his father's shop, his familiar greeting would betray to assistants and customers that they were old friends, not mere acquaintances and the last thing she wanted to do was to arouse local gossip. At first she thought she and Gerald might renew their former friendship, though nothing deeper, but on reflection she felt that might be dangerous and it would be wiser to avoid him as much as possible.

At last Jennifer got shoes she liked. Then she walked back, on the opposite side of the street, past the Emporium, where she could not resist stopping for a minute to have a quick glance at the windows. Only that morning, Rhoda had remarked on the poor method of display there.

"Alderman Price will have to put on a better show as soon as new shops are built. Just now he hasn't got any rivals, but wait until big firms set up branches in this grand shopping centre, and he'll find he has to pull up his socks."

Actually, Jennifer had not realised that the Emporium standard of window dressing was poor. Yes, she thought, those winter coats are grouped stiffly. One doesn't feel tempted to rush in and buy one.

Working with Stephen, she was developing a sense of display over museum objects which she now applied to women's autumn fashions. She moved to the next window and was embarrassed to see Gerald instructing a man and a girl how to place goods in it.

Gerald saw her immediately. He made a sign to wait and, though she cursed her foolishness in stopping to look at the Emporium windows, she could not ignore his obvious message. In a minute, he was in the street and asking her to come and have coffee with him in a nearby café, the Oliver Twist.

"You seem very busy," she remarked.

Gerald looked sheepish.

"It's a case of the blind leading the blind. Our windows are ghastly, but without the know-how I don't make them much better. I'm trying to persuade the old man to send one of our assistants for a proper course in window-dressing, but I can't convince him how necessary this is."

They went into the Oliver Twist where Gerald chose a table for two at the extreme end of the room. Jennifer hoped they could have their coffee and come away before the regular mid-morning patrons arrived, and she watched the waitress taking the order and wished the girl would hurry. Then she realised Gerald was talking.

"You aren't listening."

The waitress had gone while Jennifer drifted into a nightmare of worry, oblivious to the remarks of her escort. She made a hasty, confused apology, and Gerald repeated the information that he had been in the museum the day before.

This mention of the museum struck Jennifer as a preliminary to some Town Council news which he would have heard from his father and was probably connected with absorption of the museum. She stiffened a little, getting ready to state her father's decision to keep it within the Tomlinson orbit, but Gerald was on quite a different course. Walking through the Natural History section, he explained, he noticed a stuffed seal that was wrongly labelled.

"The label says common seal, but the specimen doesn't belong to that species."

"Is it a grey?" enquired Jennifer, naming the only other variety of seal she knew, and she was certainly vague about

the special characteristics of either grey or common seal.

"No, not a grey," said Gerald. "It has very distinctive semi-circular bands stretching from shoulder to tail, making the shape of a harp, and that is why the species is usually called harp seal. I've seen hundreds and hundreds of them in the Arctic."

Jennifer knew he must be correct and wished he were not, for she did not relish the prospect of pointing out to Stephen, who prided himself on verifying facts, that he had made a mistake. And she knew Stephen had identified the only two specimens of seal the museum possessed. Mr. A. T. N. Jones had been content to label each one SEAL and leave it at that, but Stephen said the species should be given as well and that one was a common and the other a grey.

"I'll get the label changed," sighed Jennifer.

Putting aside the problem of how to approach Stephen, she asked Gerald to tell her some of his adventures in the Arctic.

"Over a single cup of coffee? If I began, I'd go on talking for the rest of the day. I'll wait until we've got more time."

No, of course, it was silly to press him now, with the café filling up, so she drank the rest of her coffee and was about to say she must go when Gerald began to talk again.

"I shall have to go back there—though God knows when! You've heard of something gripping one's soul, and the ice is like that. It holds and fascinates you, and you feel you've got to see it again. I love the frozen north."

"It is grand of you to give all that up because of your father."

"Couldn't help it," he muttered, flushing. "Mat feels his missionary work is a call from the Almighty, so he isn't free to come here. As for Lew, well, he and Father can't get on and never will. Besides, he's mad on farming and his wife is a farmer's daughter, so I couldn't expect them to pack up and come to take on the Emporium."

Gerald suddenly switched from his family back to the Arctic, telling Jennifer she need not think life there was a grand jamboree of winter sports, with gorgeous northern lights flashing across the sky like a perpetual display of fireworks.

"Aren't the northern lights beautiful?"

"They're superb—dazzling—undescrivable. No, I just meant that there is another side to the sheer beauty there."

As Jennifer looked at him, enquiring and puzzled, he said, "It can be bloody awful in the winter darkness when you are cold and lonely and you begin to think you'll never see the sun again. I hate isolation, and what makes the feeling of isolation a hundred times worse is the darkness that goes on and on and on. You begin to fear it won't end."

"Were you alone in the Arctic winter then?"

"There were other fellows with me," replied Gerald. "We were working together on meteorological records, but they weren't my sort and I couldn't stick them. Real public school snobs!" His dark eyes were hard and his face had lost that impish look. "Having nothing in common with folks around you is isolation. My God, I was nearly demented with loneliness! Haven't you ever felt like that?"

"No, I don't think I have."

As a child she was alone a great deal, but after her sister Dilys was born there was the baby to play with. Jennifer was eight when her mother died, and from then onwards, she had her father's exclusive devotion and constant companionship. Even when they were separated, as when she went to London University and he was in Tremynach, he wrote her long daily letters.

Gerald was watching the expression of her eyes and, once again, he read her thoughts as he used to do years ago. The old power of unspoken communication was there and he knew there was still the same powerful rival, the rival who had previously defeated him. He hated Jonathan Evans, this parent who exerted such an extraordinary spell over his daughter.

Aloud he said, "I suppose your father's company is still so all-sufficient that you don't know what loneliness can mean."

She had to admit that was true.

"Let's beg whatever gods there be that you never do."

They lapsed into silence. Gerald stared at the other people in the café without actually seeing them. Jennifer had her back to the crowd, but she guessed the café was full and feared it was too late to make an inconspicuous retreat.

Then Gerald looked at her with a smile that was his usual goblin-like grin. His rather short nose appeared even shorter and his eyes grew kind as he asked her if she had forgotten the visits they used to make to the London zoo.

Of course she remembered those outings. They opened a new world to Jennifer, who knew very little about animals, except from books and the stuffed specimens in the Tomlinson Memorial Museum, and she discovered that watching even reptiles with a guide like Gerald was a fascinating pastime. It was fun, too, to see the little Himalayan bears eating the honey that he gave to the keeper to put in their cage.

She and Gerald used to wander round the Mappin Terraces, holding hands, stopping to look at different creatures, while Gerald talked and talked. Then he would find a secluded spot, away from the gaze of other visitors, where they could have a moment alone and he could snatch a few kisses. Marvellous days, but gone for ever! Jennifer felt the ominous approach of middle-age coming to engulf her. As soon as she got halfway through the thirties she would be middle-aged, she thought, and then, in another thirty years she would be a discontented, frustrated grumbler like Aunt Rhoda. She shuddered. Why could not one be young for the whole of one's life span of eighty or ninety years?

"When I was in the Arctic, I spent a lot of time watching seals, and, thank heaven, that's something I can carry on with, even while I am slowly decaying in this stagnant civilised hole."

"Won't you have to go to the coast for that? Do seals come as far south as Wales?"

"There are masses round the Pembrokeshire coast where a cousin of mine lives. She is married to a farmer and I'm hoping to spend a long weekend with them soon. Why don't you come too?"

"That would be fun," began Jennifer, then stopped abruptly as she thought of the train of ideas such a trip would start in the minds of her aunts.

Gerald mistook her hesitation.

"Good lord, you don't think I'm going to rape you while we're watching seals, do you? Don't be so childish! I know you are not in love with me now, but surely we can still enjoy doing things and going places together?"

Jennifer did not answer and he went on to talk enthusiastically about the coming breeding season when the female seals would be on many of the isolated West Wales beaches with their young. That would be his opportunity to study the seal calves, and she could help him.

"I'd love to come if I can, only it is a bit difficult. Well, suppose you let me know when you decide to go and, if I can, I'll come with you."

Gerald thought to himself, You mean if you think your infernal father will be willing to spare you for a mere weekend. But he bit back the bitter words and did not say them aloud.

He signalled to the waitress, got the bill, and they walked out, provoking astonished glances from housewives, as well as from office and business workers, for it was the popular time for mid-morning coffee. Jennifer greeted a group of elderly women, amongst whom was the Reverend J. D. Jones' wife. Through her, the news would reach Aunt Marty.

It soon did, but Jennifer had had time to prepare a glib response when her aunt coyly questioned her.

"Know Gerald Price? Well, of course! We were in the

same form at school, and then I used to see him and his brothers when I came with you to chapel affairs, though I don't think I ever spoke to them then. Oh, having coffee with Gerald,—well, we met not long ago when Stephen and I were looking for the house of that Mrs. Bowen-Jones I told you about. Gerald and the farmer brother were driving some sheep along a narrow lane, and the car scared the flock. Lewis Price looked so mad. I'm sure he thought us a frightful nuisance, but Gerald showed us the way to Mrs. Bowen-Jones' house."

"So now he is taking you out to morning coffee."

"Encourage him, Jennifer," urged Rhoda. "That will pep up Stephen and he will start to hurry on with the divorce. He wants a bit of gingering."

Marty coughed. She did not really approve of divorce.

"Gerald Price is a very fine young man, darling, and now he has had his little fling abroad, it looks as though he is going to settle down and be a wonderful help to his father at the Emporium."

"Gerald happened to see me looking at one of the Emporium windows this morning," said Jennifer. "He came out and invited me to coffee because he had a message for Stephen. Stephen has made a mistake over labelling a stuffed seal. He has called it a common seal and it ought to be a harp seal."

This explanation bewildered Marty, whose only knowledge of seals was that expensive fur coats were made from their skins. When she thought the matter over, she came to the conclusion that Gerald was using stuffed seals and museum labels as a means of becoming friendly with her niece, a friendship she hoped would develop.

But Jennifer was determined this should not happen. She decided to give up all thought of going with Gerald to Pembroke-shire when she realised what comments the trip would produce. The endless chatter, or "clec" as it was called in

Welsh, over teacups, coffee cups, in cafés, in homes, in Aunt Marty's chapel . . . Jennifer set her lips firmly and told herself no.

Then there was her father to be considered. He would not be silly like Aunt Marty, but it would vex him that his daughter could be friendly with a son of Alderman Price. That was a fresh complication. When she was at the university she was not conscious of Jonathan's dislike of the alderman.

Another problem was how to break it to Stephen that he had made a mistake in the seal identification. He was dreadfully touchy about any criticism and, to make things more difficult, he was in the throes of one of his bad moods, coming to work each day complaining of a headache and depression. Either he had not been able to sleep the night before, or he had been tormented by nightmares, especially one that, he said, occurred again and again.

"I am shut out from some place by a locked door, so I wander off into a forest. Then I lose the path and I fall down and can't get up. I have the most ghastly feeling of utter helplessness, as though the whole world is against me, and I wake up shaking all over. I just don't know how much longer I can go on like this."

Jennifer wanted him to see a doctor, but Stephen said he had and it was no use. Then he told her what was causing his worried state of mind.

"Melanie wants me to call off the divorce. She's written three times asking me to let her come to Tremynach so that we can make a fresh start. Oh, why was I such a fool to tie myself up with her! I'm willing to pay money so that she can keep herself and those bothersome children, but she must stop in London. I want to be free, not cluttered up with a wife and brats."

As Stephen felt like that, Jennifer did not urge him to agree to Melanie's proposal, though, inwardly, she thought it wrong of him to shed his obligations, especially parental ones.

Still, as she told herself, she was not in a position to judge. If he and Melanie were not suited it was better for the divorce to go on and for Stéphen to have the freedom he so badly wanted.

Chapter Four

As JONATHAN read through the letter a second time, Jennifer got the impression that the contents pleased him. She, and her father and aunts, were having breakfast, and she had noticed the London postmark, then the crest on the envelope, when she collected the mail.

"I shall be going to London early Friday morning. Lord Meadows wants me to meet him at his club in the afternoon, and then stay at Barfield Towers."

Jonathan proclaimed this, in the style of a nineteenth century paterfamilias, probably just as Thomas Tomlinson and Noah Tomlinson had informed their wives when going away on business, and being pleased he did not push back his coat and tuck his fingers into his waistcoat armholes.

Marty and Rhoda made exclamations of surprise. The exalted Lord Meadows, well known to them in childhood days, last visited Tremynach to attend their mother's funeral and they had not seen him since. There was a regular exchange of Christmas cards and Marty read aloud any mention of him in the newspapers, for he was a well-known figure.

Jonathan handed the letter to Jennifer and, while she read it, he told his sisters that he had written to Lord Meadows to find out if he knew any way of obtaining financial aid for rehousing the Tomlinson Memorial Museum.

"There are societies who give grants towards social and cultural projects, I believe. It's worth trying. Anyway, he has invited me to come and discuss the matter."

Marty clapped her hands, said it was a wonderful scheme, and wanted to know how long her brother would be staying at Barfield Towers, Lord Meadows' country mansion.

"Only until Monday, and then I shall spend the night in town."

He turned to Jennifer.

"Will you drive me to Cardiff early on Friday morning so that I can catch the half past eight, and perhaps you will meet me on Tuesday as well? I shall be arriving about a quarter past five."

"Of course, Daddy."

The telephone bell rang and Jonathan went into the hall to answer it. Marty then burst into a flurry of reminiscences about Lord Meadows and how charming he and his wife were, while Rhoda, who was inclined to hold left-wing views and scorned titles, condemned Lady Meadows as a "snob of the first water." The wrangle stopped when Jonathan returned.

He was very elated, rejoicing in what was apparently a "find" for his present book. The telephone call was from the Reverend Jesse Deiniol Jones, who was as enthusiastic over Tremynach history as Jonathan. The minister had heard that a Spaniard in his ninety-seventh year could give facts about life in the ironworks. A number of Spaniards came to work at Bonwylfa in the iron era, settled in the district as a distinct community, became absorbed into the local population as a second, and third generation grew up, and Jonathan had not known that any of the original emigrants were still alive. He was thrilled at the possibility of obtaining some first-hand information about conditions eighty years ago.

"The Reverend J. D. says Camlo Florez is so old that he can be very awkward and unco-operative. He will pretend he can't understand anything but Spanish and his granddaughter

will have to interpret for us. Can you come and take notes for me?"

Jennifer said she would and asked when they were going. Her father explained that he had agreed to call for the minister shortly after three o'clock that very afternoon, and the Reverend J. D. would show them the way to Carlos Street.

"What about Dilys?" interposed Rhoda. "If she doesn't care to go with you she can come for a walk with me and the poodles."

Dilys was expected for the day at Derwen and Jennifer, knowing her sister's dislike of walking, said Dilys would love to visit the old Spaniard.

"I forgot Dilys was coming," said Jonathan.

"She'll be here for lunch, Daddy."

Dilys was nearly eight years younger than Jennifer. This difference in age prevented that intimate exchange of childish confidences which would probably have taken place had the gap not been so great. As it was, each walked by herself. Dilys knew nothing of her sister's love affair with Gerald Price. She kept equally secret her own association with David Morgan until she was ready to announce her engagement, and this came as much of a surprise to Jennifer as to the rest of the family. Marriage soon followed the engagement, but so far the couple had not had any children. Jennifer did not know whether this was due to infecundity or because Dilys did not want any, for she expressed neither distaste for offspring nor desire to have them.

Yet there was a strong bond between the two daughters of Vera Lorimer. Dilys admired her big sister while when Jennifer was told about the new baby, she told Jonathan proudly that she was going to look after this little sister. Jonathan was very relieved. He had worried lest Jennifer should resent the new arrival after being the only child for so long.

At that time he had no suspicion that Vera's second daughter was not his as well. He found that out a few months

later when Vera died and he made the dreadful discovery of her long association with a secret lover. There were letters to her from the dead man, put away in her bureau, and from these he learnt that he was not Dilys' father. As the child grew older, her lack of resemblance to him, to Vera, or to any members of their respective families, was very noticeable.

Dilys was short, with a round almost podgy face, creamy skin, and snub nose. A look of wary watchfulness emanated from her light forget-me-not blue eyes. Her figure was becoming plump and, though not yet twenty-five, she was rapidly acquiring the appearance of a middle-aged matron and already looked older than Jennifer who was so much her senior.

Jonathan had too proud a nature to disown this second child and thus blazon abroad his dead wife's infidelity. He brought up Dilys as his daughter and he made every effort to be a kind father, but it was impossible for him to simulate an affection he did not feel. Jonathan Tomlinson Evans was a poor actor. Also, by nature, he was a physically undemonstrative man. True, Vera had inspired him with passionate sensuous love and to Jonathan their marriage was paradise, but, like Adam in the biblical garden of Eden, that paradise was lost to him. The one gleaming star in his firmament was Jennifer, and he could neither help showing his great affection for her, nor completely conceal his aversion for Dilys.

He sent Dilys to boarding-school as soon as she was old enough, while Jennifer attended the local grammar school. Dilys' very presence irked him and he was conscious inwardly of a great relief of tension when she was out of the way. She lived in Cardiff now she was married and her frequent visits to Derwen were endured by Jonathan who did his utmost to pretend these were as welcome to him as they were to Jennifer and his sisters.

The truth about Dilys' parentage was one of those secrets which was widely known. Jennifer often wished that the difference in Jonathan's attitude between her and Dilys were

not so obvious, but there was nothing she could do about it. As a schoolgirl she learnt from servants' chatter that the little sister was really only a half-sister and, long before she was grown-up, she knew the whole story of her mother. Dilys knew this too, though how or when Jennifer was not sure. She thought it came from an old maid, Grace, who died when Dilys was sixteen, for, it was from that time that Dilys developed a tendency to run down the Tomlinson family and anything connected with it, including the ruined Drysgoed ironworks and Derwen. The museum usually escaped her scorn.

On leaving school, she told Jonathan she wanted to take a commercial subjects course and he paid for her to attend classes in Cardiff. Originally it was intended that she should travel daily, but Dilys soon found a flat there. Then she met David Morgan, became engaged in spite of his formidable widowed mother who, up till then, had managed to keep her single offspring a bachelor. The resigned Mrs. Morgan decided the couple should live with her, an arrangement to which Dilys agreed although Marty, Rhoda, and even Jennifer, told her she was making a ghastly mistake. However, Mrs. Morgan died suddenly from an attack of thrombosis, so Dilys was able to marry without any mother-in-law burdens.

She and David continued to live in his old home. When his parents first moved there, the house was considered to be in the country, but now it was engulfed by a new housing estate, and they were thankful for the large garden that ensured privacy for them. By profession David was an accountant but his job was only a means of securing a regular income, his interests being concentrated on house and grounds. Married life for him and Dilys was one round of ceaseless activity, and Jennifer often wondered what was the use of working so hard when they never had time to pause and enjoy the fruits of labour.

The house was like a showplace for a "Do It Yourself" exhibition. David was his own mechanic, so the car ran per-

fectly and had the appearance of a showroom model. He used it for journeying to and from work, but Dilys hardly ever drove it, for they were too busy to go out often at weekends and holidays. The garden, with greenhouse built by David, yielded wonderful flowers and a profusion of vegetables and fruit, far more than the couple could consume fresh, so, throughout summer and autumn, Dilys pickled and salted, bottled and made jam.

Today she arrived at Derwen with a large basket containing jars of home-preserved pears, home-made tomato chutney, redcurrant jelly, and a couple of cakes. Marty received these gifts with delight and went into raptures over Dilys' achievements and how lucky David was to have such a wonderful wife. Rhoda was appreciative, but not so gracious.

"You slave very hard, Dilys. I hope David realises how much you do."

"Of course he does," cooed Marty. "David knows what a lucky, lucky man he is."

"Be careful you don't spoil him. As it is you are over-feeding him." Rhoda sounded as though Dilys' husband were some species of dog, like her own poodles."

Marty was gently, but constructively, criticising the girl's coat.

"It doesn't sit properly on the shoulders, darling, not to look really smart, and that's such a pity because it is a most becoming coat and I'm sure you paid a lot for it. Let me see what I can do later. It only needs a little fixing. Perhaps there'll be time before you go off on this jaunt . . . oh, you don't know, of course, but Jennifer and the Reverend J. D. and you are going with Jonathan to see some queer old man in Bonwylfa."

"Some queer old man in Bonwylfa! Why are we seeing him?"

Marty launched into an incoherent, long-winded explanation that was interrupted by Rhoda calling from the kitchen for Dilys to come and look at the new puppies. Jennifer

managed to say as Dilys obeyed, "I thought you'd rather come with us than help to exercise the dogs," and her sister nodded in agreement.

Rhoda wanted Dilys to buy one of Sparkle's litter, insisting that a dog was a necessity these days to protect any house against burglars. Dilys looked at the squirming white midgets, whose ability to defend anybody or anything was a long time off, and made the excuse that no burglars came to her suburbs.

"Don't tell me you are becoming ar.d-dog like Jonathan."

"Of course not, but David and I don't happen to want any pets. We've enough to do without bothering with them." Dilys shuddered at the thought of a puppy messing up her immaculate home and digging holes in the super-neat garden.

Jonathan, with his real and his supposed daughter, called for the Reverend J. D. Jones at the appointed time. The minister was a man for whom Jonathan had a great respect and liking, although Jonathan was antagonistic to organised religion in any form and wild horses would not have dragged him into his friend's chapel, except for some ceremony like a funeral that family convention forced him to attend. The Reverend J. D. was a sturdy, hearty man, who lived up to his Christian principles without making a parade of them. Kindly, humorous, talkative, enthusiastic, he was an entertaining companion, and, like most Welshmen, had a fiery independent spirit coupled with a poetical imaginative strain. His wife was a great friend of Marty's but not so generally popular. She waved goodbye as he got into the car and Jonathan drove away.

Jennifer asked after the two sons and one daughter, all miraculously successful in their respective spheres. One son was in the U.S.A., and the Reverend J. D. gave a long dramatic account of Tal's latest achievements and some new friends he had made called Frazier. Tal was staying with this Professor and Mrs. Frazier and he wanted his parents to invite them to Tremynach when they came to Britain next year.

By the time the minister had finished his story, Jonathan had driven almost to the top of a by-pass road that encircled the town and came out at the northern boundary. The ruins of the once famous ironworks of Bonwylyfa were hidden in the valley below, but one could see a great iron "tip", whose pepper-grey jagged sides and flat summit stood out in marked contrast to the pointed heaps of black coal dust that were piled on the hillside on the right of the by-pass.

On reaching the main road, the car turned left down it, in the direction from which they had come, to enter the district called Bonwylyfa. Here were streets and streets of ugly nineteenth-century dwellings. Most were scheduled for demolition, but first new houses had to be built for the occupants.

Housing in the industrial valleys was a favourite topic with the Reverend J. D. Jones, and soon he and Jonathan were in the midst of an argument about the iniquities of the Victorian capitalists who built such miserable insanitary cottages. Naturally, Jonathan Evans defended the old ironmasters, declaring they were not bad employers nor unmindful of people's welfare, and that housing standards were vastly lower then.

Jennifer had heard it all before and was not listening. She was picturing Bonwylyfa a hundred years ago, when the ironworks sent clouds of smoke from their tall chimneys like volcanoes in eruption. It had been the same lower down the valley where the Drysgoed works were situated. Streets resounded to the noise of clanging waggons. The ruined buildings were alive with men who, stripped to the waist, turned molten iron with long tongs inside the red-hot ovens. At night when one or more blast furnaces were opened, the glow in the sky from the flames could be seen fifty miles away. Now, even the memory of Bonwylyfa and Drysgoed works was fading and, as Tremynach prospered under its different new industries, the past only remained alive in the books of an historian like her father.

Under the minister's directions, Jonathan left the main street, passed through a couple of dreary narrow ones, and turned into the still narrower and very steep Carlos Street. Mean little houses, each with one or more chalky-white doorsteps coming direct on the pavement, flanked either side. There were no front gardens. Yet many of the dwellings were painted brightly and old small windows had been replaced by large modern ones. Several cars were docted up and down the street. Jonathan was obliged to park his lower down than Mr. Florez' house because of a large one that occupied the space immediately in front of No. 7.

"That must be Gerald Price's car," said the Reverend J. D. Jones. "I asked him to come along this afternoon. He understands Spanish so well that I thought he should help us with translating old Florez' tales."

It was well known that Alderman Price had married a daughter of a Spanish emigrant living in Bonwylla, but, eager as Jonathan was to collect information about the alien colony once living there, he would never have condescended to invite assistance from a member of the Price family. Besides, there was no need of another interpreter as well as Mr. Florez' granddaughter, who had promised to be there. Jennifer felt very awkward. She realised that Mrs. J. D. Jones must have told her husband about the café meeting and he thought he was helping matters by bringing Gerald into the conclave.

Jonathan had not actually met Gerald Price before, but the Reverend J. D. Jones took it for granted the two were acquainted, a natural assumption in a small friendly town-like Tremynach. A young woman opened the door, showed the guests into a back room and announced their arrival to Mr. Florez, who sat in an armchair by the fire and looked thoroughly bewildered by so many visitors.

Mrs. Harris, the granddaughter, made some excuse about seeing to things in the kitchen and disappeared, leaving the

visitors alone with the old man who had sunk back in his arm-chair, half asleep. Before rousing him, Gerald warned Jonathan that Mr. Florez was very suspicious about anything being written.

"I could have brought my tape recorder, but I was afraid the sight of it might scare him and then he would shut up like a clam."

The minister suggested that Jennifer sat in a corner, where she would not be noticed, and wrote down as much as she could while he and Mr. Evans questioned Mr. Florez, through the medium of Gerald, and listened to the replies. Dilys settled herself by a window which looked into a built-on kitchen, and this modern kitchen interested her far more than reminiscences of the Bonwylfa works several decades ago.

Gerald proved to be adept in extracting replies from Mr. Florez in response to Jonathan's enquiries, and he swiftly translated them into English. Jennifer scribbled hard in a notebook. At first, the old man supplied many unusual details, but after a time he grew vague and appeared to lose interest. Suddenly he shut his eyes and gave every evidence of determination not to humour his visitors any longer that afternoon. Jonathan agreed with Gerald that the session was at an end.

The Reverend J. D. looked at his watch and said he had an appointment for half-past four. It was now twenty minutes past. They all got up to leave.

"We must say good afternoon to the granddaughter," said Jonathan.

Dilys tapped on the window and Mrs. Harris opened the door leading from the kitchen. She was quite concerned about them leaving without having tea. The Reverend J. D. was profuse in his apologies and, late as he already was for his appointment, he wanted to return by bus while the others stayed "to do justice to this charming little lady's hospitality that I so sincerely regret I am unable to share. You do under-

stand, don't you, my dear, that duty calls? But I shall not deprive you of anyone else's company, There is a bus quite near . . . ”

Jonathan insisted on driving the minister to Tremynach. Politeness would have otherwise compelled him to have tea, but he was thankful for the excuse to escape from any social, and to him boring, chatter. The Reverend J. D. stopped Jennifer and Dilys from coming as well by asking Gerald to give them a lift later. He thus paved the way for the young couple, as they were already labelled in his mind, to enjoy one another's society a little longer. Jennifer writhed, imagining the story to be related to Mrs. J. D. Jones that evening, and in due course passed to Aunt Marty. Fortunately, her father was without suspicion, for Jonathan was a very unobservant person, and in this instance he took it for granted that his daughter and Gerald Price were previously unknown to each other.

After Jonathan and the minister had gone, Mrs. Harris brought in tea, a lavish spread of cold ham, tomatoes, pickles, bread-and-butter, jam and several kinds of cake. Mr. Florez had his food on a little table by the fire, and the guests and hostess sat round a large table under the window.

It transpired that Gerald's mother's father and Nita Harris' grandmother were first cousins, which surprised Dilys who had not realised Alderman Price's wife came from a Bonwylyfa family. She asked questions and Gerald told the story of his father's elopement. It seemed amazing that the respected stodgy alderman ever did such a dashing thing as to elope, still more that his bride defied her family to marry him.

“Do you wonder if I and my brothers are a bit odd when we spring from such a union?”

Dilys did not reply. Her interest had strayed back to the kitchen that she could see through the dividing window, and she commented on some piece of equipment there. Nita was delighted to talk about it and the next step was an offer to show it to Dilys at close quarters. The two went off, while

Jennifer and Gerald remained in the sitting-room and Mr. Florez snored rhythmically by the fireside.

"I'm taking a few days off from the Emporium treadmill and going to Pembrokeshire on Thursday. What about it? You promised to come with me."

"It was only a half-promise," began Jennifer.

She already regretted doing that. In any case, she explained, Thursday was out of the question for she had to drive her father to Cardiff early Friday morning to catch a London train.

"Follow me down on Friday after you've seen him off. I can give you directions how to get to the farm."

He could read doubt and hesitation in her eyes for he exclaimed angrily, "My God, what is it now? You say your father will be in London so you haven't got to be dancing attendance on him. I've promised not to make love to you and that my behaviour will be a hundred per cent platonic. What else are you bothering about?"

"My aunts are the trouble," replied Jennifer. She never had been able to hide things from Gerald. "They have such out-of-date notions, and if I go to this farm with you—well, they won't believe we just want to watch seals. Their minds run to marriage at once, Aunt Marty already scents a romance between us since a friend told her we met for coffee that morning. You see, none of my people know that you and I were friends in London. Oh, Gerald, I simply can't come!"

"Why not pretend you are staying with Dilys in Cardiff? I'm sure she'll give you an alibi, and keep her mouth shut."

"Oh, she would, but it seems very underhand."

Gerald said that was rubbish. She would only be preventing her aunts from "getting hold of the wrong end of the stick."

"I want company," he urged. "You've always been good company when we used to go places before, so do come. I want to share my enjoyment of seals with you."

Dilys would back her up and she did want to go. It might

be the only chance she and Gerald would have of such a trip, since a platonic friendship in Tremynach was beset with difficulties. Although her father was not matrimonially-minded like her aunts, he would be vexed to learn she was friendly with a son of Alderman Price. It was providential that Jonathan should be going to London this coming weekend.

Gerald was saying he had difficulty in persuading his father to spare him from the shop. He finished up, "I think the old man is afraid to drive me too hard, though. He looks upon seal-watching as a waste of time but he's also afraid I might decline to chuck the Emporium. Not that I should let him down! However much I feel like a caged tiger, I wouldn't do that."

"Do you really hate it so much? I am sorry."

Gerald avoided Jennifer's sympathetic glance.

"Would you say I was cut out for the dull restrictive life of a shopkeeper?"

Without waiting for any answer, he begged her again to come with him to Pembrokeshire, repeating that he wanted her company.

Jennifer pictured stretches of golden sand covered with dark bodies of seals, of turbulent Atlantic rollers crashing on the shore and flinging silvery spray over rocks and sand. The sound of wind and waves and cries of gulls rang in her ears. Something stirred within her. She wanted to go with Gerald to this remote spot. She wanted to come face to face with the unfettered sea and to watch these creatures that came out of the sea. She looked at Mr. Florez slumbering by the fireside. One day she too would be old and unable to enjoy the sun and the wind and the waves.

"All right," she said to Gerald. "I'll fix things with Dilys and meet you in Pembrokeshire on Friday, after I've seen Daddy off. Tell me exactly how to get to your cousin's farm."

Chapter Five

WHEN ONE person is seeing another off by train, last minute conversation is often forced. Jennifer was acutely conscious of this as she and Jonathan strolled up and down the railway platform at Cardiff General Station. He was buoyed up with the hope of obtaining financial help through Lord Meadows, as well as advice and moral backing. In fact, he was toying with the idea of having a grand opening ceremony for the museum when moved to Nebo, and inviting his kinsman to perform this. That would make town councillors, like Alderman Siencyn Price, envious.

Rousing himself from these dreams of the future, he outlined to Jennifer his plans while away. First, he had an appointment with Lord Meadows at the latter's club. Then they were to drive to Buckinghamshire. On Monday morning, Jonathan was returning to London to follow up any concrete suggestions from the noble lord. If time permitted on Tuesday, he should call on an old university colleague who now worked at the British Museum, but he would certainly catch the one-fifty-five train from Paddington.

Jennifer listened dutifully, saying "Yes, Daddy," at appropriate intervals. She was less cheerful than usual, and even he noticed the slightly strained look so foreign to eyes that normally sparkled with gaiety. He concluded she was worrying

about the museum's future, so again repeated his optimistic belief in the results of Lord Meadows' interest.

"I want enough money to cover the move and to make a good thing of this conversion. Whatever extra I can get in addition to the Corporation compensation will be very, very welcome. Meadows is going to be a great help. I could see that as soon as I read his letter. Of course, altering an old chapel and turning it into a museum is bound to be costly. Derwen would have been far cheaper—and easier. I wish your aunts had not been so unco-operative."

Jonathan sighed and Jennifer flashed back a loving look of sympathy. She was inwardly oppressed by the burden of her own deceit, an absurdly antiquated reaction as she kept telling herself. Here was she, a woman of thirty-two, free to act exactly as she pleased, yet experiencing this guilt feeling because she was letting her father believe she intended to spend the ensuing five days with Dilys, when she would be doing something quite different for three of them.

But to tell her father the truth could only cause him annoyance. His prejudice against Alderman Price would colour his view of her friendship with the alderman's son. Why must you get mixed up with such people? She could imagine him saying something like that, and, still worse, feel the scorn behind the words. There was too the possibility that he might develop suspicions that this friendship was something deeper, something that could grow into a closer relationship. Aunt Rhoda and Aunt Marty were trying enough with their matrimonial schemes, but she did not want her father distressed by such notions. To them, her marriage to any "nice" young man was something to be desired. To Jonathan, it would be a tragedy. She was so necessary to him.

"And I can't tell Daddy that Gerald and I were once in love but that love is absolutely dead now."

No, she was doing Jonathan a kindness by this harmless deception, and it did not harm anyone, least of all him. Only

she loathed the feeling of being underhand. What a silly schoolgirl word! If her previous friendship with Gerald were known to her father, explanations would be simpler. As it was, they were impossible.

While Jennifer was at the university, her father was living in Tremynach and seldom came to London. They wrote to each other every day and she was with him during vacations, but she had no inclination to mention Gerald Price to him. There was a chilly remoteness about her darling father that repulsed confidences of any kind, and she had not acquired the habit of telling him what she did apart from their own joint activities. It was easy enough to discuss with Jonathan the heroes and heroines of old tales in the *Mabinogion*, a Welsh classic they read together, but not her friendship with Gerald.

Jennifer looked at his tall, taut, slim figure. She admired the air of command and the pride with which he carried himself, pride that came naturally to a grandson of Noah Tomlinson, owner of the great Drysgoed ironworks. Jonathan Tomlinson Evans had the same thin, straight, somewhat haughty nose as his ancestor. Jennifer's was similar, though not so long and without giving that arrogant effect. Jonathan's eyes and hers were the identical shade of blue, but his seldom lost their sombre expression.

Most people's reaction to him was one of being kept at arm's length. Subconsciously, Jennifer felt this though she never acknowledged it, even to herself. Apparently, she and he were far closer than most daughters and fathers. True he had not mentioned her mother to her since Vera's death, but Jennifer took it for granted that the memory of this unfaithful wife was so distasteful that he preferred to avoid any reference to her.

The train drew alongside the platform and all was bustle and hurry. Jonathan had a reserved corner seat in a first-class compartment and, after finding it, he came to the window to talk to his daughter. He had already lightly pressed his lips

to her cheek with one of his rare kisses before getting into the train. She saw the remaining places in the compartment were occupied by other men. One of them wanted to speak to a friend who was waiting on the platform so, after a final greeting to her father with assurances that she would meet his train on Tuesday, Jennifer stepped back. In a couple of minutes the guard waved his flag.

She was due to call at Dilys' house for coffee before driving westwards. It did not take long to reach Rosebank, so-called by David Morgan's parents because of the large number of roses planted in the sloping front garden. In the mild weather of early October, these were still blooming in full splendour, but though Jennifer admired the riot of colour she found something artificial about such extreme perfection. Every bush and standard bore a neat label, showing the name of the variety, and grew in well-regulated fashion because of correct pruning. Jennifer preferred the disorderly, unrestrained effect of the Derwen garden.

Dilys opened the front door, greeted her sister, took her coat to be hung up, and ushered her into the beautifully-fitted, gleaming kitchen, which was always tidy and, like the rest of the house, never had a speck of dust on any of its contents. Jennifer sat down at a brightly painted modern table to enjoy excellent coffee made from an up-to-date, efficient machine.

The first thing she had to do was to enlighten Dilys about her former friendship with Gerald, for Dilys had not known anything about this ten years ago and was naturally very curious. There was no opportunity the other day to do more than ask her sister to provide an alibi and to impress upon her the importance of strict secrecy. Now Jennifer told her the whole story.

"And you say love between you is absolutely out now, and that's how you want to keep it. Is that because you'd rather marry Stephen?"

"I don't intend to marry Stephen or Gerald. I'm not in love with either of them."

Dilys remarked that it was a pity because Gerald seemed very nice and Stephen was all right. Then she poured out more coffee and listened to a summary of events leading up to the seal-watching trip with its attendant complications.

"So you can see why I must keep all this from the aunts, and of course from Daddy. I couldn't bear him to have wrong notions about my knowing Gerald, especially now he is so peeved about the Corporation's offer to take over the museum. He blames Alderman Price. I knew he disliked the old boy, but I didn't realise how much until all this happened."

"H'm," sniffed Dilys. "It would be a knock-out blow for Daddy if you married anybody—son of Alderman Price or son of some deceased Mr. Partridge. You've bound yourself up too much with Daddy and let him depend a hundred per cent on you."

"It suits me."

"I suppose you've got your reward. Daddy does idolise you."

There was a wistful note in Dilys' voice. As Jennifer knew, her sister adored Jonathan and must often feel envious of the favoured one.

To escape from the awkwardness of this subject, Jennifer gave a dramatic and slightly exaggerated account of Rhoda's warning, and this set off Dilys into an almost hysterical fit of laughter.

Recovering and wiping her eyes, she declared seriously, "Daddy would never, never marry again, not after the way he was let down before by that bitch."

To Dilys, the dead Vera was a mere name, not a person. She was far too young to have any tangible memories of her mother, but hated her intensely for having had the lover. Dilys knew that man, not Jonathan, was really her father, and that she had no right to the surname of Evans. She never spoke

about this, not to Jennifer, not to her husband, nor, to anyone else. The bitter resentment was something she kept to herself, but traces of feeling escaped in her grudge against the dead woman and her scorn of the Tomlinsons of Drysgoed.

"Daddy has obviously gone in for celibacy now," she continued. "Doesn't Aunt Rhoda see he's become as frigid as any monk? Of course she's a fool the way she will natter on about the poodles' sex life in front of him. Haven't you noticed how he loathes hearing about their matings and pregnancies?"

"Daddy doesn't like dogs anyhow."

"You're telling me! He was queer enough when you once asked him if you could have a puppy."

"Was he?" Jennifer tried to recollect the occasion and how her father behaved, but had completely forgotten it. She dismissed the matter. "That was ages ago."

"I was seven and you were nearly fifteen," said Dilys. "I didn't understand what he meant then, but I was scared because he looked so horribly fanatical when he told you it would displease him, very much. You asked why he didn't want you to have a puppy."

"What reason did Daddy give?"

"That a pet animal reminded him of the animal side in his own nature, and it was something he wished to forget. Didn't that strike you as queer?"

"No, I can't have taken it in properly."

"It stuck with me. And the way he said it gave me the creeps. I knew too he was livid with rage when Aunt Rhoda started her dog-breeding side-line business at Derwen, and I thought he would have a row with her, only Aunt Marty was keen on her dear sister making a spot of cash, so dear little brother had to keep his mouth shut. Really, Aunt Marty in her way bosses Daddy as much as I suppose old Grandmother Evans did. I wonder if the worm will ever turn."

"Don't compare Daddy with a worm," said Jennifer,

rather hotly. "It just happens that he looks up to Aunt Marty, and she is so lovable. Well, so is Aunt Rhoda, only differently. She was trying to be kind and helpful when she gave me this silly warning about Daddy perhaps marrying again."

"Daddy taking a second wife is as probable as ancestor Noah Tomlinson getting up from his grave and walking down Tremynach High Street."

Dilys still seemed incredulous that seal watching could be the real reason for Gerald and her sister meeting in Pembrokeshire. When she said goodbye, her last remark was, "See you on Monday. Have a good time with Arctic Boy Friend, but look out when the fun and games start."

"There aren't going to be any fun and games," returned Jennifer.

• Until she had passed the outskirts of Swansea and was well on the way to Carmarthen, the journey was through an industrial part and somewhat dull, but gradually the scene became more countrified, and she found it a pleasant change to see lush green fields, neatly trimmed hedges, and tall graceful trees. The copper tints of real autumn were not yet apparent and most of the leaves were still green, or green mingled with a pale foxy-brown. Jennifer herself could not feel the summer was over. She was radiant, alive with excitement, even singing as she drove along the twisting road that went up and downhill like a switchback railway in a fun fair. •

At Carmarthen, she deliberately made a detour to pass the withered stump known as Merlin's oak. She was anxious to see the ancient tree which legend linked with King Arthur's magician, though historians declared this to be a myth. An old superstition said its existence was bound up with the continuation of Carmarthen itself.

Stopping the car to look at it, Jennifer was glad there was no such belief about the Derwen oak being essential to the permanent survival of her own family. Like Jonathan, she

loved that tree, and it was the recollection of her father telling her about the Carmarthen one which made her go out of her way to see it today, but it was long past its glory as a tree while the oak at Derwen was still in its prime. When she was little, Jonathan used to help her to climb into the branches, and the two of them would spend a summer afternoon, hidden by leaves, while she listened to stories—made-up by him—of bygone days when Druids worshipped below, then came Roman legions . . . yes, her father had a wonderful imagination regarding the past. She wished he were not so discontented with his present book. She must help him to rewrite the beginning when he got back from London. She hoped he would be less worried about the museum then.

Jennifer was back on the main road. After Carmarthen, she drove on and on coming at last to the county of Pembrokeshire. It was easy until she reached Haverfordwest, but after passing through that town she had to look for the various landmarks Gerald had given her on a rough map that she had been carefully studying. The window on her right was lowered, and when she began to smell the sea's salty tang she knew she was getting near the coast. More twists and turns, through a couple of hamlets, yes, that was the lane by an inn and a forge. Gerald had marked them on the map.

She entered the lane and it grew narrower and narrower until she almost prayed she would not meet an oncoming vehicle. With high banks on either side, such an encounter would mean that one of the two would have to back some distance. The track was rough and full of potholes so she had to drive very slowly. Then the lane ended and in front of her were barns, sheds, and other out-buildings of a farm. This must be Pwllgwaun.

Jennifer was greeted by a plump, fair-haired girl, who introduced herself as Molly Jones, Gerald's cousin and took the guest upstairs to a bedroom. Dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour, she said, so this gave Jennifer time to

pull things out of her case and change into more suitable clothes.

The midday meal was served in an old-fashioned kitchen where Jennifer found Gerald and Owen Jones already waiting. There was a virility about Gerald today, a keyed-up animation that struck her. He seemed almost violently alive. The talk at dinner was mostly about seals. Gerald had been to an island that morning and gave a rough estimate of cows and calves there, for so he called the females and babies. Owen said there was a big increase in the number of seals round the coast this year, but he used the Welsh word "morlo" meaning literally "calf of the sea."

As soon as the meal was over, Gerald and Jennifer set off. Holding her hand, as he used to do in London, he helped her down a winding steep cliff path that led to a sandy beach, flanked on either side by slabs of indigo rock, while the greyish-blue sea seemed motionless until they got closer and could see little white-crested waves, but these were so tiny they only just ruffled the smooth surface. Gerald remarked that the sea was unusually calm for October. "It might be a summer's day." Certainly the sun shone with an August warmth.

Jennifer wanted to know where the seals were and he explained that this was not one of the bays they frequented. She would see nurseries, as he called the assemblies of mother and young, on the next two beaches.

"You can't get into the far one without a boat. I'll be taking you there tomorrow, but as the tide is out now we can walk into the next bay."

They passed rocks sprawling and towering upwards on their right. Lower ones covered with slippery black seaweed were strewn across the sand. Then they came to a causeway, only visible at low tide, and walked over it into the second bay. As they went, Jennifer noticed numerous bullet-shaped dark heads bobbing up and down in the shimmering sea.

"Mermaids or business tycoons—just as you like to think of

them," laughed Gerald. "You'll see plenty of bulls at close quarters when we are out in a boat tomorrow, but this afternoon we'll concentrate on cows and their calves. The cows will probably bolt as soon as they scent us."

Once in view of the second beach, Jennifer gasped in amazement at the sight of enormous, dark, slug-like bodies with small creamy, or pale grey, objects beside them. Suddenly there was panic. As Gerald had said, every mother made a dash for the sea as though a warning siren was screeching its note of alarm, but in spite of clumsy movements, each one got over sand and pebbles with remarkable rapidity, splashed into the water, and vanished like a depth-charge.

"Fancy leaving their babies like that!"

Gerald shrugged his shoulders and smiled. She asked him what species of seal these were and he said they were the grey. He did not think the common seal came much to these beaches.

"What about the harp kind?"

The harp seal, he explained, kept to more northerly waters, though an occasional one might be found so far south. Probably the specimen at the Tomlinson Memorial Museum was a stray one shot somewhere in this region. He did not refer to Stephen's incorrect label nor ask if it had been altered yet.

The remaining hours of daylight passed like an entrancing dream for Jennifer as she helped Gerald to take measurements of seal babies. The very young ones were charming with big appealing eyes, and they did not object to being handled, but week-old calves made protesting noises and even attempted to bite. After Gerald had obtained the data he wanted, the two found a secluded spot by rocks near the causeway and lay there to observe the mothers coming back. The tide was slowly coming in and Gerald said they would have to leave as soon as water started to cover the passage for he did not want Owen to have the bother of fetching them by boat.

It was fascinating to watch returning mothers propelling heavy fat bodies over the sand in a curious combination of

arching, dragging, and sinking movements. Jennifer whispered to Gerald that dry land seemed the wrong element for them, and he explained that seals only came ashore to have young, or else to rest, but though they were creatures of the sea she felt they were the rightful owners of this beach. It belonged to seals. She and Gerald were the intruders.

Gerald's attention was completely absorbed in mothers and babies. Jennifer's eyes wandered from them to him, from his coarse curly hair to his short decisive nose, then to his thick lips slightly parted, lips that once had been pressed to hers. But she did not want to resuscitate the past, nor even dwell upon it. Instead she thought again about Gerald's sacrifice in giving up the life of wandering and exploration for which his soul craved. He had done it because of a sense of duty towards his father, a conscientiousness she would not have believed once that he possessed. Years ago he complained so violently about her daughterly devotion that she felt a sense of bewilderment that now he should show such consideration for the old alderman. It was queer, she reflected, how one could think one knew everything about a person's character, and then stumble across a hidden element that one never expected was there.

Chapter Six

DURING THE next two days, Jennifer lived in a glamorous, magical world, untouched by the realities of ordinary life. She and Gerald went by boat to the isolated beach he had told her about, also to several secluded coves on a large island just off the coast. It was thrilling to skim over the silken grey-blue sea, whose surface was only mildly stirred by gentle waves. Then, as they drew near a beach, there were always seals lying on rocks, seal heads showing above the water, and seals with their young strewn over the sand or occupying low ledges on the cliffs.

At one spot, Gerald steered the boat through a narrow opening into a vast cavern where they saw massive black adult seals, presumably bulls, taking their ease. Emerging into the open sea again, Jennifer saw others were swimming towards the entrance and, as she looked at their alluring expressive eyes, she understood the origin of fishermen's tales about mermaids enticing humans into the ocean depths.

Unafraid, these seals came quite close to the boat and hovered around for some time. Gerald said it was because of their well-known inquisitiveness and he likened them to Kipling's elephant's child who was possessed of insatiable curiosity. Their nearness was useful to Gerald who was anxious to get photographs of them. Jennifer noticed that he used his

camera only to take shots of seals, not scenery or humans. He did not once ask her to pose for a picture. Just as well, she thought. It was better that there should not be any record of her presence in Pembrokeshire. All the same, it piqued her a little that Gerald should be so completely concerned in gathering material for the book he intended to write. He was as wrapped up in this work as her father in his local histories, she decided. But Jonathan always made her feel part of his work and that she was necessary to him even when he was concentrating on something else. She helped to give birth to that history of Tremynach, but with Gerald's book on seals she would be an outsider. Then Gerald looked up from his camera with a smile of triumph, said he had got good pictures, and she began to feel she was sharing in this scientific creation of his through coming with him on the trip, and that he was glad to have her companionship.

They returned from the island only a short time before sunset, and, after putting away Owen's boat, Gerald said as supper would not be ready yet they might as well go for a walk and he took her by a narrow path along the top of the cliffs. Sea and sky turned amber, orange, and red-gold with rays from the setting sun. Gerald put one arm round Jennifer's shoulders and started to describe his emotion when the sun made its first brief re-appearance after months of darkness, a darkness he found hard to endure during the first winter he spent in the Arctic.

"I saw a few rosy-pink streaks, like a trail of rose petals across the sky on the horizon. Of course they quickly disappeared, but I had had that message of hope with the coming of light. You know, there was that feeling that life was being born anew, like the description of creation in Genesis. 'And darkness was upon the face of the deep . . . And God said, Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good . . .'"

Gerald broke off, looking embarrassed. In a mocking tone

of voice, he continued, "Queer how the Welsh nonconformist tradition of bible reading has lingered with me. I don't go to chapel—to the disgust of my respected sire—and God knows what exactly my beliefs are! I suppose if you are a Welshman by birth you can't help the religious strain."

"Why do you feel you've got to apologise for it?"

"I don't," and he relaxed. Smiling, and making Jennifer think of a mischievous hobgoblin, he said, "Maybe I'm descended directly from some Druid. Didn't the early Britons worship the sun? Well, there are times when I feel like prostrating myself in homage before it. Just look at those superb colours before they vanish."

She stood close to him on the cliff, but he did not put his arm round her or even touch her. Together they watched the sun sinking. Then they walked back in silence to the farm. The holiday would come to an end on Monday morning when Gerald had to return to Tremynach and Jennifer would go to Dilys' until Tuesday afternoon. She tried not to think of her father, not even wonder if he were finding Lord Meadows co-operative. This was her own, secret, magical weekend and she was determined to enjoy it, not mar it by worries and pangs of conscience.

On Sunday evening, Owen Jones took his wife to Haverfordwest, where one of the chapels had a famous preacher, and Jennifer promised to listen for any cry from their eight-months-old baby. She and Gerald settled down in the parlour, with the door ajar so that they could hear the slightest sound from upstairs.

Gerald wrote up notes while Jennifer lolled in an armchair, thinking about those enthralling two and a half days spent on lonely beaches and on the sea. The screeches of gulls, the bleating wails of seal babies, and the murmuring of the waves, still rang in her ears. She closed her eyes to recapture better the picture of that mystic cavern tenanted by seals. Then she was back on the open sea, watching those human-looking

creatures swimming around, their heads bobbing up and down as they gazed curiously at the boat.

Gerald stopped writing and looked at her, studying her face in repose, the soft curve of her lips and the way the dark lashes lay on her cheeks. Ten years ago he had given up the idea of making Jennifer Evans his wife. Not that Gerald Price was easily daunted, but any future with her seemed hopeless. He was convinced that a girl with that strong father-complex was as unattainable as a mythical mermaid. He stifled his love for her and at one time he thought he had killed it. Now he knew it was as fervent as ever.

Jennifer opened her eyes, saw him gazing at her, and came back to her present surroundings.

"Have you finished your notes?"

"Yes, I have. You look happy."

• She smiled with that radiant gaiety he knew so well. She was still the dazzling creature of his youthful dreams, the Jennifer whose joyousness used to make him think of golden buttercups and spring sunshine. He loved the way her eyes crinkled when she laughed. That smooth skin and air of happy serenity made her seem like a girl scarcely out of her teens. Yes, time had stood still for Jennifer Evans during the last ten years. In one way, Gerald was disappointed she had not developed as a woman of thirty ought to have done. The stultifying influence of that selfish cold stick, he thought, meaning Jonathan Evans. But he loved Jennifer and he knew she was the only girl he had ever wanted, and would want, for his wife. •

He began to talk in matter-of-fact tones about the book on seals that he intended to write. He had studied a number of different species and obtained a great deal of data in the Arctic, but he must visit seal haunts and breeding grounds in the British Isles. There was an island off the Kerry coast in Eire that was his next objective.

"I mean to go there in two or three weeks' time and stay

for a month. Of course the old man will grumble about my leaving the treadmill again so soon. This nature study hobby, as he calls it, seems crazy to him, but I happened to mention I intended to write a book on seals, so he has visions of son Gerald making a whack of lolly, maybe even appearing on television. I thought I'd better not shatter him by saying I didn't care a dam about publicity or the money."

Then Gerald talked about the other kinds of seals he wanted to study. Jennifer had not realised there were so many species besides the grey and the common and the harp.

"It will take you a long time to collect all the material you want."

"I'm afraid it will."

"Can you do it without going back to the Arctic?"

"Yes, but there are other parts of the world I must go to see different species. Besides, apart from my work on seals, the frozen north calls at times to anyone, who has once been there. They say you feel frantic and that you just have to see the ice again."

"But you hated the darkness and the long winter."

"That was only one side," said Gerald. "I hate loneliness anywhere, and by loneliness I mean isolation of mind and spirit. You could get that in a crowded city like London. Oh, there is a restless devil in me, Jennifer. If I do manage to stick Tremynach and the Emporium for the rest of my days, I shall have to have a respite now and then. I know I shall have to return to the Arctic, not once, but again and again until I die."

She was very moved by the passionate emotion that possessed him. He quickly came back to normal. Then the look of embarrassment swept over his face, as when he had told her about his exaltation on seeing the sun once again. She asked what his brothers, Mathias and Lewis, thought of the sacrifice he was making in working at the Emporium.

"They're sympathetic, but they can't do anything. Lew is

tied to his farm and Mat to his missionary work, and that's that. I could endure the dreary round better if I could have the other thing I want.

His gaze was fixed intently upon her, penetrating her being like the beam of a powerful searchlight, and he said, "I want the same thing as I wanted ten years ago."

"Oh, Gerald, don't!"

"I still want you, Jennifer."

"No, you mustn't think like that. It's no use."

"I love you as much as I ever did."

"Now, Gerald, you promised this weekend was to be strictly platonic."

"And aren't I behaving in the most perfect Sir Galahad manner? I've scarcely touched you, and I'm simply longing to take you in my arms and crush the life out of you. I want you, Jennifer. If we were seals, I'd just take you, and that would be that."

"I'd be one of your harem then."

"No," said Gerald. "This bull seal wouldn't want a harem, only the one cow he adored."

"But seals aren't like that. You told me they were polygamous."

"Polygamous or not, they're a damned sight more sensible than humans. Marry me, Jennifer. I love you and my love won't alter."

"I wish it would," she whispered, but he went on without paying any attention to her remark.

"Life in Tremymach would not be so damnably frustrating if I had you, sweetheart. At least I'd be coining money for you and our children, instead of for the old man who has plenty already."

"Gerald, it's impossible. Won't you ever realise that my father comes first, and I can't put him second to any other person?"

"I shouldn't be taking you right away from him, as I

wanted to do before. We would be living in Tremynach now. Of course, Mr. Evans won't think I'm socially good enough for his daughter, but you're not a snob."

"There's nothing to be snobbish about. Your family is every bit as good as mine. We had money years ago when yours didn't. Now the greater part of ours has gone."

"The Welsh aren't a people who go in for a lot of class distinctions," went on Gerald, still dwelling on the supposed inferiority of his family. "But your father is only half-Welsh, and he thinks the Tomlinsons of Drysgoed were it. Then he has never wanted you to marry anyone, has he?"

"Oh, Daddy isn't like that! He wouldn't object to my marrying if I wanted to, but I don't. Gerald, you must see that I can't. Daddy and I are such close companions and I love being everything to him. I won't give up my life with him. I couldn't satisfy you. You want a devoted wife who will put you first."

"Hasn't every man the right to demand that?"

"Yes, of course, and that's why I won't marry because there would always be the pull of Daddy. I love sharing his interests and going everywhere with him. You know the pattern of my life well enough."

Gerald did. Jennifer was too obsessed with her father to allow a husband to occupy anything but a subsidiary place in her life, and this state of things infuriated him. He stared down at his notebooks lying on the table, trying to gain control over his anger. It was terrible that a father should have this emotional hold over a daughter and, loving Jennifer as he did, Gerald cursed the selfish possessiveness of Jonathan Evans. The situation violated all nature's rules. Wild creatures cast off their young as soon as offspring could fend for themselves. They did not batten on the offspring, sucking out the very life blood. "I could fight a rival lover but pitting oneself against a father is such a hopeless business."

Jennifer was thinking how unwilling her father would be

to share her with any husband, just as Gerald would not want to share a wife. She hoped she had made that clear, once and for all. Snobbishness did not affect the situation. Her father was class conscious to the extent of glorying in his Tomlinson forbears, but not so class ridden that he would want his daughter to marry into any particular section of society. Of course he could hardly be expected to welcome the son of Alderman Siencyn Price.

Not that she need worry about that. She had no intention of marrying and thus relinquishing the position of being his one, adored companion. Yet she was fond of Gerald, very fond. In fact, were it not for her darling father, she could easily fall in love with Gerald again. The last few days spent in his company made her feel vulnerable, but that would pass when she got back to Tremynach. It was just the magic of this weekend.

"I don't really love you," she said aloud. "I like you, but I don't love you."

"You did once."

"Midsummer madness, and that's over. I don't think I'm cut out for marriage."

"Don't be such a fool," stormed Gerald. "The trouble with you is that you are like some bleeping satellite revolving round your father, and the sooner you get yourself out of orbit the better. It's absurd to sacrifice your life to him."

"You are sacrificing yourself for your father, so you needn't blame me for doing the same thing."

"It isn't in the least the same," he retorted. "I'm not giving up marriage and children and a home of my own. The Empofium is a sort of god to my father and after he lost Ed, one of us had to come home to help him. I'm denying myself a great deal, but I mean to get away for periods and I hope to keep on with some of the work I want to do. I'm fond of the old man, but I haven't any warped hysterical devotion to him. I haven't got a daddy-complex like you."

"I've no room in my life for marriage."

"You say that because you let yourself be dominated by your father, and it's wrong. You're a fool, Jennifer."

"You can think that if you like. Maybe I am a fool, but I just happen to choose to be one."

"Why? Why? Why?"

"I keep telling you. I adore my father and I want to go on being everything to him."

"Nature meant you to be a wife and mother, not your father's slave."

"I'm not a slave. Daddy needs me and I'm glad he does. I'm completely satisfied with my way of life. It's a happy, enjoyable life."

"You mean it's a cosy, comfortable one." Gerald's voice was full of scorn. "I'm beginning to think, Miss Jennifer Evans, that you're a victim to the deadly sin of sloth. You cling to your father because you're too lazy to face life properly."

Jennifer did not reply. She was cross with him, and wanted him to realise that and apologise, but her silence made no impression on Gerald. Suddenly he asked her if she remembered the description of Issachar in the bible.

"I don't, and if you are going to say I am like some unpleasant person you needn't bother to tell me."

"Issachar was one of Jacob's sons." Gerald quoted mercilessly. "'And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear; and became a servant unto tribute.' I used to read the bible during the long Arctic winter. You'll be telling me you wish I had chosen some other book."

"I'm telling you that you are absolutely wrong. I'm no servant or slave. I'm thankful that I can bring happiness to my father. You know all the scandal about my mother. Well, he suffered terribly through her unfaithfulness and, of course, he has never wanted to marry again after such disillusionment,

and, well, he naturally depends on me, and I will never desert him."

"Do you really kid yourself that by pandering to Mr. Evans' whims you are taking your mother's place with him? You're more of a silly child than I thought."

"I don't care what you think me. I'm going upstairs to see if the baby is all right."

Jennifer soon returned. She did not want Gerald to think she was so piqued that she would stay there sulking, but her short absence had made him regret his exhibition of temper, and he apologised for being rude.

"It doesn't matter," she said coldly. "I don't mind."

"That's the trouble—you don't mind. I wish to hell you did and then I might stand a chance of having you some day."

He talked about seals and the possibility of inducing his father to spare him for a trip to Eire, but he did not say he needed a companion on this second seal-watching occasion. It was a relief when Owen and Molly came back from Haverfordwest.

Chapter Seven

THE TAXI arrived at Paddington Station, stopped, and Jonathan Evans got out. He only had the one case, which was not heavy, so shook his head at the porter who approached him. Then he turned to settle with the taxi driver, picked up his case, and made his way to Platform 2 where the Cardiff and West Wales train was already waiting. It had only been shunted into the terminus bay a few minutes previously, for there was a good half hour before the time of departure, but Jonathan had a habit of arriving early to catch a train. He disliked rush. Also, though he kept this secret from Jennifer and his sisters, his doctor had warned him hurry and agitation were things he ought to avoid.

On this occasion too, he was anxious to get away from London and shake off memories of an unpleasant weekend as soon as he could. Even the last morning was disappointing. His old acquaintance at the British Museum was ill and not in work, so Jonathan had an early lunch and actually left his hotel before one o'clock to catch the five minutes to two train from Paddington. As always happens in London when one has plenty of time, there were less traffic hold-ups than usual.

Jonathan passed through the ticket barrier and walked along the platform, making for the front part of the train, which he preferred. The first-class compartments were all empty.

Jonathan selected one, put his case on the rack, and sat down. He hoped any fellow travellers would be business men, occupied with reading papers or writing or sleeping, and that no one he knew would join him. The last thing he desired was a lot of chatter around him, or to be compelled to talk himself. He wanted peace to think.

The weekend was a failure. Lord and Lady Meadows were entertaining several other guests and, from the beginning, Jonathan was bored with the company in which he found himself. Host, hostess, and guests were all reforming types, burning with zeal for social progress, but their notions of achieving this did not coincide with his. Boredom changed to irritation as it slowly dawned on Jonathan that he was only of interest to the company because he lived in Tremynach, a place they considered in a bad state of decay, even for Wales, and Wales seemed to them a sort of remote outback covered with coal mines in the south and mountains in the north. Jonathan was shocked at their ignorance.

As for Tremynach! One man said the town ought to be demolished and the inhabitants resettled in up-to-date surroundings. He was annoyed when Jonathan asked if he had ever been there and he had to admit he had not. Lord Meadows, whose last visit to Tremynach was many years ago when he attended Janet Evans' funeral, described it as a "huddle of hideous buildings" and made this pronouncement in a sing-song voice, supposed to be the way the average Welshman spoke. As for the Town Council's plan for a new shopping centre, the nobleman declared the "dump" not worth it.

Jonathan Evans was furious. He knew Tremynach was an unfortunate product of nineteenth-century industrialism and a modern architect's nightmare, but so were many other towns in Britain. Narrow streets and ugly buildings disfigured several places he could name. Ignoring the sneers of his audience, Jonathan insisted that Tremynach was now progres-

sive and prosperous, and though there were still scars from its original phenomenal growth, and later from the trade depression of the thirties, these were being swept away. Amenities were being increased and it was surrounded by magnificent country.

He knew he made no impression on Lord Meadows and Lord Meadows' friends. They were determined to believe Tremynach was a corpse past hope of revival, an attitude that maddened Jonathan. He had little enough interest in people as individuals, but he loved the inhabitants of his native town in the mass, just as he loved every inch of earth there, whether it was unspoilt countryside, man-cultivated land, or man-disfigured land. It was all Tremynach, the town set amid awesome hills and whose glorious past he tried to bring to life in his local histories. He knew it was right mankind should look forward to modern developments, but he also held the theory that Tremynach's future grew from her past and to forget that past was a denial of a precious heritage. The remains of past glories, such as ironworks, were ruined and fast vanishing, but as buildings crumbled Jonathan wanted the memory to live on.

Jennifer, the Reverend Jesse Deiniol James, and Rees Williams, were the only people who understood the depth of his feelings for the town. The minister and the solicitor, not Jennifer, also perceived in Jonathan's glorifications of the past an unconscious endeavour to cover up wrongs done to Tremynach by his ironmaster ancestors. Jonathan would admit mistakes had been made, but argued these were inevitable in Victorian days and that they were outweighed by benefits brought to the town by such employers as the Tomlinsons of Drysgoed, Englishmen who opened up the iron era there.

However much he and his friends might disagree they would have been of one mind in repudiating the shallow condemnation of Tremynach by Lord Meadows. In fact, the Reverend J. D. would have contradicted his lordship more

violently than did Jonathan. As it was, Lord Meadows disliked having his exaggerated picture spoilt by irrefutable facts. He felt somewhat of a fool in front of his houseparty, and was less inclined to help his relative than he had been before. He certainly had no intention of giving a donation towards re-establishment of the Tomlinson Memorial Museum. As for charitable bodies able to contribute financially, he knew of none whose scope included a case like that. His solution to the problem was the very one Jonathan refused to consider.

"My dear fellow, why not put it up to your Mayor and Corporation that they take over complete management? Don't you see, the onus of finding a new home for your museum, and supporting it, will rest on their shoulders then? Oh, I know the old institution was endowed by Noah Tomlinson and has always been controlled by your family, but that sort of thing is an absolute anachronism nowadays. One must move with the times, you know."

Jonathan was thankful when Monday morning came and he could escape to town. He registered at a London hotel and was conscious of being so exhausted that he was obliged to lie down for some time. Later he got up, had tea, went for a walk, had dinner, and spent the evening sitting miserably in a secluded corner of the lounge, worrying about the museum and worrying about an unpleasant pain that had previously troubled him a few months ago. He did not even tell Jennifer about that but went to see his doctor, Rees Williams' brother, who warned him to take things easily and relax more. Jonathan followed the advice and took the prescribed drugs. Until today, he had been better, and he knew the recurrence of the pain was due to his agitation and annoyance. He really must be sensible and not fret about the museum's future, or let himself be nettled by men like Lord Meadows.

He hoped for useful advice from his acquaintance at the British Museum and was disappointed when he found the man absent from work on sick leave. There was nothing else to do.

Jonathan had lunch, got a taxi, and drove to Paddington. Now he sat in the first-class compartment, feeling rested and without that annoying pain, but acutely conscious of failure and longing to be back in Tremynach. There he would have the comfort of his daughter's sympathy. She would share his disillusionment over Lord Meadows. She would understand his anger and frustration.

Thinking of Jennifer, Jonathan remembered that he had not bought her a present. That was a shocking omission, especially as he rarely went to London. He looked at his watch. The train was not due to leave for another twenty minutes, plenty of time to go to a sweet shop on Platform 1 and buy a fancy box of chocolates. Jonathan put a book to reserve his seat, although a case on the rack should be sufficient indication that it was taken, then he hurried to the barrier. He showed his ticket to the collector, explained he was returning in a few minutes, made his purchase, and soon came back through the barrier.

The end half of the train seemed fairly full now and passengers were continuing to arrive. Most of those walking in front of Jonathan disappeared into second-class compartments, but as he approached the set of firsts in the front half of the train, he was obliged to slow down his pace because of a woman and two children just before him. Apparently the woman intended to get into that first-class coach.

Jonathan hoped she would not select his particular compartment. He did not want a couple of small children fidgeting and talking throughout the journey. •

Children were an unknown species to Jonathan Evans until Jennifer was born. Then he marvelled at the wonder of her, but it dawned upon him very soon that his wife was jealous if he made too much fuss of the baby. He was sorry about this, but he was flattered to know how greatly Vera valued his love when she was prepared to put motherhood second and did not want their own child to be a rival to her. Because

of his love for Vera, Jonathan was careful to assure her this could never, never happen, and accordingly he rationed his petting of Jennifer and his playing with her. He behaved in the same way during the first few months after Dilys' arrival.

The awful discovery of Vera's long-standing affair with another man was such a shock that he hated any reminder of family life. The sight of Dilys was distasteful to him. With Jennifer it was different. Jonathan found solace in her company and, even when she was a little girl of eight, he looked upon her as a mature companion, contemporary with himself in thought and outlook, and he treated her as such. In some respects she grew up in "advance of her years, while in other ways—altogether, in Gerald Price's opinion—she remained a teenager now—she was over thirty.

Along the platform, in front of Jonathan, walked the woman with a little boy on one side and a small girl on the other. From their height, the boy was five or six years old and the girl about four. Not that Jonathan made any such deduction. He was absorbed in trying not to catch up with them.

Then the party paused by the steps of an open carriage door, the door giving access to the coach in which was his compartment. The woman half turned and looked down the platform. Pausing too and following the direction of her glance, he saw she was watching a large trunk and several cases being put into the luggage van by a porter.

It was while she was watching this operation that something else happened. The little boy, still holding her hand, was amusing himself by dangling one foot over the very wide gap between carriage and platform. His shoes must have been too large and fitting loosely, for he burst into a howl of distress, followed by loud pathetic sobs, and held up a shoeless foot. The shoe had fallen off and gone down the gap. Politeness forced Jonathan to approach and be prepared to act in this crisis, but before he had time to offer assistance he heard a slightly mournful voice gasp in reproof, "Oh, Johnny!"

The old familiar exclamation, uttered in plaintive tones, with the cooing note he always associated with Vera, and, for the moment, train and figures were whirling round and Jonathan was only conscious of the reappearance of what seemed in his imagination to be the ghost of his dead wife.

There was really no definite physical likeness between the two women, except that both had large grey eyes, but Vera's had had a curious green glint in them. It was the voice and cry of "Oh, Johnny!" that brought back a vivid reminder of the past and made Jonathan Evans imagine a resemblance between this stranger and the woman he had once worshipped.

As if in a dream, he heard Johnny's mother saying to him, "My little boy has dropped his shoe. What can I do about it? We must catch this train."

"Johnny is very naughty," remarked the little girl.

"Hush, Unity darling!"

Jonathan was too dazed to be helpful in this emergency. He stood on the platform, staring at the woman, unable to move. Then the porter, who had been stowing away the luggage, arrived to collect his tip. The little girl repeated her observations about Johnny being naughty, while the unfortunate culprit continued to sob and wave his shoeless foot. The porter grasped the situation straight away.

"Don't cry, Sonny! I'll be down under the wagon and have your shoe in a jiffy, so cheer up."

He clambered down, rescued the shoe, and put it on the little boy's foot. By this time, Jonathan had recovered enough to take part in the scene and hand the porter a pound note. Johnny's mother poured out profuse thanks, mainly to Jonathan as though he had brought back the shoe, while Johnny was instructed to say his thanks. He did this to the porter, who said, "Best get in the train before you fall down yourself."

"Yes, we must hurry up or we'll be left behind in London."

This possibility so alarmed the little girl that she began to

clamber up the carriage steps. Jonathan lifted her up, then Johnny. The woman came behind.

"Go along the corridor to the third door. That's where I am and I'm sure you will find empty seats there."

It was the confiding appealing air of this woman that hypnotised Jonathan into directing her and the two children to the very compartment in which he intended to travel. The porter followed. Actually, there was nothing for him to do now but, with the memory of a super-lavish tip, he bowed good afternoon to the donor as though Jonathan were a peer of the realm. He assured Johnny's mother that every piece of luggage had been put safely into the van, reminded her she had to change trains at Cardiff, then finally departed.

"You've been so very kind. I don't know how I can thank you enough."

Jonathan had done nothing towards recovery of the shoe, but he felt like a knight-errant who had just slain a dragon and rescued a beautiful maiden from the jaws of death. The woman sat in the corner seat directly opposite to him, and her large grey eyes oozed gratitude. Somehow they brought Vera to life again. He remembered that hunt ball when he first met her and she looked at him in the same respectful, admiring way. This woman too, had appealing lips and she also held her head a little on one side. Vera had had that habit.

The boy sat close to his mother, and the little girl was in the far corner. At least, she was in the process of gradually wriggling nearer and nearer that corner so as to be by the window. She had straight flaxen hair, pale greyish eyes, and pale cheeks, but a clear-cut nose and determined mouth redeemed the insipid effect of her general lack of colour. Jonathan hardly glanced at her. His attention was held by Johnny and Johnny's mother. That boy, he told himself, was exactly like the son he and Vera ought to have had.

"It must be a son to carry on the Tomlinson family tradi-

tion," Jonathan told Vera when she was expecting a child.

He was disappointed until he had his first sight of Jennifer, then he experienced such a thrill that her being only a daughter ceased to matter. The second one would be a son. But Vera explained she could not possibly endure the torture of another pregnancy.

"You know how I suffered, Johnny, far, far more than most women do. Oh, you surely don't expect me to go through that awful agony again, do you?"

So they agreed not to have any more children. Janet Evans despised her daughter-in-law for the apparent inability to produce a son, and she was as jubilant as Jonathan was worried when it became known Dilys was on the way. Vera was exceptionally sweet when he blamed himself.

"Accidents will happen, darling. Oh, I expect I'll be all right. Doctors have learnt a bit more than when I had Jennifer."

There was no real likeness between Vera and the woman sitting opposite to him. Vera's hair had been an indeterminate shade of brown, called by Jonathan chestnut, but she used to brush it until it shone and she spent money to obtain the skill of a first-class hairdresser, whereas Johnny's mother did not look as if she ever went near one. Her brown locks hung lankly below the brim of a dull mushroom-coloured felt hat. The shade was quite wrong for her muddy skin, especially as she wore no make-up. Vera had an exquisite complexion. But to Jonathan, this woman in the train recalled old, almost obliterated, memories. For the moment, he forgot how Vera's treachery had killed his dreams and stunned his very soul. He began to feel like someone who has lain in a coma for years and suddenly regains consciousness. He wanted to talk to this sweet creature who, in his eyes, was so like his adored Vera. He wanted to make a fuss of the little boy, who could so easily have been the son he had wanted Vera to bear.

He remembered what the porter said about changing at

Cardiff and asked the woman if she had far to go after that.

"About another hour's journey, I think. I have to get a slow train up some valley to a town called Tremynach. Are you going to Wales? Do you know it?"

"Yes," said Jonathan. "I live there."

"Oh, how funny that I should meet you."

The woman smiled, showing quite pretty teeth, Johnny smiled, and the little girl remarked, "Daddy is at Tay-mun."

"Tray-mun-ack," corrected Johnny.

"Try and say it properly, Unity," urged her mother.

Unity did her best. Jonathan applauded her efforts and tried to make her roll the letter r, a proceeding which both children looked upon as a great joke.

"Tremynach is quite a small place, isn't it?" went on the woman. "I mean, I wonder if you know of my husband. You may have heard of him, even if you haven't met him. He is curator of a museum there, the Tomlinson Memorial Museum."

Jonathan was staggered by this announcement. When he appointed Stephen Partridge he learnt that the man was unhappily married and, because of this, was anxious to get away from London. Later, Marty and Rhoda talked in front of him about the impending divorce, but Jonathan heard their chatter without interest. When he made the appointment, he was sorry for his new curator who had this matrimonial trouble, but thought no more of the matter as he took it for granted that Stephen's wife was the one to blame. Looking at Melanie Partridge, Jonathan was convinced that his previous assumption had been wrong. He must certainly put pressure on "that cad" to do the right thing by suffering wife and innocent little children.

"Do you know my husband?" Melanie was watching the changing expression on this stranger's face.

"Indeed I do, Mrs. Partridge. I happen to be the owner of

the Tomlinson Memorial Museum and your husband's employer."

"Oh, how extraordinary! Isn't it under a Town Council? I know there are museums owned by learned societies, but I didn't know there were any private ones like this left nowadays. Is it your very own?"

Jonathan explained the history. When he finished, Melanie Partridge remarked in awestruck tone, that she had not realised what an important person he was, and that she was terribly interested in museums and had worked in two before her marriage. She was sure the Tomlinson Memorial Museum must be a wonderful place.

Johnny was listening avidly to the conversation, but Unity had grow bored and was looking through the compartment window. Their mother sent them to stand in the corridor, after issuing instructions about keeping close to the large window where she could see them, not going near or touching the carriage door, and being "very good and quiet so that this gentleman won't think you are badly behaved." She pushed them outside the compartment, shut the sliding door, and returned to her seat. She and Jonathan were now alone.

"Has Stephen told you about us?"

"I knew he had a wife," replied Jonathan, gravely. He was not sure if he had heard of the existence of two children.

He leant forward. "Excuse me, my dear, but I did gather from your husband that the marriage had gone badly. Now you are on your way to Tremynach, I take it that you want to make things up with him." She nodded. "If I can be of any help, you can count on me. Of course I don't want to pry into your private affairs. Please don't get that idea."

"Oh, I know you wouldn't. You aren't that kind of person. I mean I could see at once that you were a gentleman. It's just that I'm in such a jam I simply don't know what to do. You see, I never wanted Stephen to start this horrid divorce

business. I think marriage is a very sacred sort of thing, don't you?"

Jonathan agreed it was.

Melanie continued. "It was Stephen who left me and then I simply had to go to Mummy and take the children. I couldn't go on living alone in London in an expensive flat, and I couldn't go back to my old job because of the children. Mummy lives in Ruislip, only she has married again. You see, my own darling daddy died when I was finishing my art training."

She went on to explain how she had obtained a post in the art department of one of London's largest museums, later gone to another museum, and there met and married Stephen Partridge. •

"Mummy's second husband belongs to a religion that says you mustn't have a divorce, so he has been against us being with Mummy, and now he says I must go back to Stephen. Of course, that's what I've been wanting to do, only Stephen has kept on saying he wouldn't have us. I've been begging Stephen to let us try again and he's been horrid, and made his lawyer send most unkind letters. I mean, I don't want to be disloyal to my husband, but all this is entirely his fault, and now Mummy has sided with my stepfather I've been forced to come. I'm terrified of what Stephen will say when he sees us. He's forbidden me to set foot in Wales, but what else can I do?"

"Of course you had to come, my dear. As a father, your husband has definite responsibilities."

"He doesn't think so," moaned Melanie. "He thinks he can pay me a mere pittance and I'll bring up the children. Oh dear, I'm so worried about them! I'm not fussing about myself, but I think it is terribly sad for them to grow up without a father. Johnny isn't six yet, and Unity is only four. Stephen is simply awful about them. He doesn't like children, and they can't help that poor little mites! They've done nothing."

She dissolved into tears and Jonathan tried to console her by promising to have a talk with Stephen Partridge. Inwardly, he was determined to deal very severely with his curator the next morning.

"Is there a nice hotel in Tremynach?" asked Melanie, wiping her eyes. "I mean, if you could give me the name of a suitable one, the children and I could stay there. I ~~daren't~~ go to Stephen's lodgings. He'd make a frightful scene," and poor little Johnny and Unity would be so upset. We must find somewhere to sleep tonight, or until I can make Stephen—well, do something!" She began to sob again.

"He will certainly have to do something for you, my dear," declared Jonathan. "I shall make him. I intend to have a talk with him at the museum first thing in the morning. You are willing for me to do that, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course I am. Oh, it is so very, very kind of you. I can never thank you enough."

She repeated her enquiries about the hotel and Jonathan promptly invited her and the children to Derwen. Melanie was overcome with gratitude.

"How wonderful of you! But are you sure your wife won't mind three of us arriving like this, without any warning? I mean, I wouldn't like to put her out."

"I live in a very large house," explained Jonathan. "It belonged originally to my great-grandfather, the second owner of the Drysgoed ironworks, but it is too big for our needs now and there is certainly plenty of room for a welcome guest like you. My daughter, Jennifer, and my two widowed sisters live with me. I lost my wife during the war."

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry."

Again the vision of Vera flashed before his eyes. He looked sadly at this woman who somehow reminded him of that other woman who had once been his whole world. If Vera had not spent that fatal night in a London hotel with her lover, she would still be alive. She would be sitting opposite him in this

railway compartment, or she would be waiting at Derwen to welcome him home.

"I can see you still feel her loss dreadfully," came the faintly familiar voice. "You must have loved her very much."

"Yes," said Jonathan Evans. "I did."

It was the first time for many, many years that he had spoken of Vera, and the first time since her death that he had acknowledged to another person what she meant to him. Half regretting the lifting of a mask, yet warmed by Melanie's understanding, he began to talk about the Derwen establishment and to explain his daughter would be meeting him at Cardiff with a car.

Melanie, he thought, must be about the same age as Jennifer, and her display of helplessness and admiring gratitude made him glad that he was in the position of powerful employer who could compel Stephen Partridge to behave decently to his much-wronged wife and little children.

Talk drifted to the subject of the museum. Jonathan told Melanie how he had to find a new home for it, how finances did not run to a new building so it meant conversion of an old one. He even let her into the secret of his plan to purchase Nebo, a secret that was only known—so he thought—to Jennifer, his solicitor, and the trustees of the chapel with whom Rees Williams was negotiating.

It was very soothing to pour out problems into the ear of an attentive listener, and a new listener too. Jennifer knew the background, but with Melanie Partridge he had to tell the story from the beginning, and he enjoyed doing this. She was practical, as well as knowledgeable and sympathetic. In connection with the conversion of Nebo, she suggested putting in a false floor from one side of the gallery to the other. That was already under consideration, but Jonathan thought it brilliant of Melanie to have the same idea, especially when she had never seen the chapel. He told her so and she laughingly disclaimed any super-intelligence.

"You are a clever man, Mr. Evans. I know we've only just met, but I soon make up my mind about a person."

"You are flattering me, my dear. Now all I have been telling you about the chapel is highly confidential. My own sisters don't know anything yet, so you will keep it under your hat, won't you?"

"Of course," promised Melanie. She went on to say, "I'm sure, Mr. Evans, that you are an excellent judge of character. You can size up a person, as well as a situation, in a flash."

This was something Jonathan was very poor at doing, but he had no conception of such a shortcoming. He took it for granted that Melanie's assumption was correct and smiled back at her, like a cat licking its whiskers with satisfaction after drinking a saucer of cream. She was a woman of unusual perspicacity. Vera had understood him like this.

Time passed so quickly that he was amazed to see a restaurant car attendant open the door and to hear an announcement that tea was being served. Jonathan, Melanie, and the children, made their way along the corridor of the swaying train. He took Johnny's hand.

"We can't have you losing your shoe again."

"No," said Johnny, and with a burst of confidence he added, "Nana bought them big 'cos she said my feet were growing."

"Nana is his grandmother—my mother," explained Melanie. "I'm sorry I let her get these new shoes. They are far too loose."

"My shoes is right," remarked Unity with satisfaction. She walked behind, clinging to her mother.

Jonathan enjoyed his tea in the train restaurant. He thought Melanie delightful, while he was flattered that Johnny regarded him as a beneficial deity. He hardly noticed four-year-old Unity, who was very astonished this man did not make a fuss of her for she was accustomed to plenty of attention from grown-up males. Her confidence was restored when an elderly

gentleman patted her head as he passed by, and she said proudly to mother and brother, "Men like me." Melanie scolded her, but Jonathan was not aware of the incident. He was busy cutting cake into manageable pieces for Johnny.

They returned to the compartment. Then came the excitement of going through the Severn Tunnel and Jonathan found himself besieged with questions from Johnny. What would happen if the roof fell down? Could the bottom of the sea break? Were they under the sea this very second? Soon the train emerged and Johnny shouted with joy, thereby drawing upon himself a reproof from his mother who told him to sit quietly and not be a nuisance and disturb other people.

"Everyone in the train will be wondering who the noisy boy is in this compartment."

"We shan't be long now," remarked Jonathan. "We'll soon be in Newport, and then it only takes another quarter of an hour to get to Cardiff. Jennifer will be waiting on the platform. Don't look so worried, my dear. She will be delighted to welcome you and the children."

Chapter Eight

JENNIFER WAS certainly surprised to see Stephen's wife arriving in Wales against the express wishes of her husband, for Stephen had told Jennifer that he wanted the divorce and wanted above all things to be free from what he called a bothersome wife and brats. But Jennifer was even more amazed that Melanie Partridge should have got acquainted with Jonathan during the train journey from London to Cardiff. He was such an unfriendly person, so it was an extraordinary gesture on his part to have invited this stranger and her children to spend the night at Derwen.

These reactions did not stop Jennifer from giving a suitable welcome. Even in a partly Welsh family like hers, the Welsh tradition of hospitality was strong, so Jennifer assured Melanie Partridge that she was delighted to meet her and of course it was not inconvenient to have unexpected visitors. As they walked down steps from the platform to the subway, along the subway, and outside the station to where the car was parked, Melanie continued to apologise for the intrusion, emphasising that it was only for one night "until I've had a chance to see Stephen and get him to make proper arrangements for us."

A porter packed the large amount of luggage into the car.

Melanie, Johnny, and Unity sat in the back. Jonathan took the wheel and Jennifer her usual place beside her father. It was a pleasant drive from Cardiff up the valley, the road becoming more winding as it gradually rose higher, for Tremynach was eight hundred feet above sea level. Melanie asked questions about the places they passed through. Naturally, she found the Welsh names a novelty and wanted to know what they meant and how they were pronounced, and it was a satisfaction to Jonathan to enlighten her. The children were silent and snuggled close to their mother on the back seat. Johnny was too shy to speak and Unity had fallen asleep.

Jennifer was astonished to hear her father so talkative. It was most unlike him. He pointed out coal-tips, something Melanie had apparently not seen before and regarded as phenomena, a modern colliery, an old farm supposed to have been a resort of Jacobites, and then, as they approached Tremynach town, he showed where lay the ruins of his family's ironworks, down in a hollow.

He turned off the main road, up a lane leading to Derwen and at the entrance he drew Melanie's attention to the magnificent iron gates, made in the works and now open in readiness for his return. The old oak, that had given the house its name, was on the other side of the building, and he promised to show it to her the next day.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Evans, that will be nice." Melanie sounded duly appreciative, though she was really concerned with waking Unity.

The standard of Welsh hospitality was maintained by Marty and Rhoda. Marty was delighted to welcome visitors because she adored excitement, though, in this case she was sorry for dear Jennifer who must be disappointed over Stephen Partidge. But divorce was an unpleasant thing, and really very wrong, and it was far better for young people to come together again. Now Jennifer ought to marry that nice Gerald Price instead. Thus reflected Marty as she bustled round, not achiev-

ing much in a practical sense, but dispensing welcoming smiles to make the guests feel at home.

Meanwhile, Jennifer was busy helping Rhoda to get a meal ready, and when that was finished, Marty took Melanie and the two sleepy children into the morning-room. With Jonathan, they watched television until Rhoda and Jennifer had made the extra beds. Jennifer wondered what her aunts' reactions were to the certain collapse of their castle in the air, in which a divorced Stephen married her, and she was thankful that a rush of work prevented comments even from Rhoda.

"If I had been in love with him, I should mind Melanie coming to Tremynach, but I don't. Good luck to her! I hope the marriage does get going again."

Jennifer was sincere in her wish for this to happen, but, recalling Stephen's outbursts against his wife, she was not optimistic, like her father, about an immediate reconciliation. Jonathan seemed to think this would happen tomorrow, and he could make the curator take back Melanie, just as he could give Stephen orders to put an exhibit into the museum.

Jennifer thought her father looked tired in spite of his efforts to appear the courteous host. She was glad to be able to tell Melanie the bedrooms were ready, watch her make the children say their goodnights and be taken upstairs, leaving him free to relax. Then Jennifer went into the kitchen to help Rhoda with the washing-up. Usually this was left for the daily helps who would be there next morning, but tonight Rhoda felt they ought to do it themselves because of so many extra dishes.

She doted on children and as she washed plates and banged them down on a draining board, she kept up a succession of enthusiastic remarks about Johnny and Unity, uttering again and again the wish that she and Ted had had a couple of darlings like that.

She was interrupted by Marty coming into the kitchen and expressing her views on the wonderful ending.

"So lovely that these two young people are going to make a fresh start. I don't think divorce is ever right and I am very glad Stephen's wife has such high principles. They will both live happily ever afterwards, like a fairy tale."

"You don't know if they will," remarked Rhoda. "It takes two to make up a quarrel."

"Stephen can never resist that dear little creature. She is sweetness personified."

"She seems all right," was Rhoda's reply. "She must have unusual charm for the opposite sex when she could wangle an invitation here, but, as I've always said, the eternal male is still hidden underneath our brother's frigid demeanour."

"Rhoda, please do not be coarse, I beg of you. If you have such unpleasant thoughts, kindly keep them to yourself."

Jennifer added her protest.

"Daddy couldn't let Melanie go to the Royal after finding out she was Stephen's wife. I know he doesn't usually concern himself with strangers, but when young Johnny lost that shoe he got to know them, and I suppose Melanie started talking . . ."

"My God, how she can talk!" declared Rhoda. "At supper, she went on and on and on, like a chirping bird."

"You are far too critical," reproved Marty. "She is very sweet and she would be quite attractive if she dressed better. That cheap yellow frock looks terrible with mousy hair. Indeed her hair could do with proper attention. 'She wants to go to a really good stylist. As for her complexion!'" She turned to Jennifer. "I'm always scolding you, darling, for not taking enough time over your face, and see how dreadful Melanie looks without any make-up at all. Done properly, it adds so much to a woman. Now you are too slack about renewing it. I don't believe you've powdered your nose for hours and your eye-shadow is messy as usual."

"When has the poor girl had a minute to look in the mirror and fix her face? Like me she's been on the go ever since our

guests arrived. If you want a job, Marty, you'd better unpack the stuff Dilys sent. Then you can get on the phone and be suitably grateful to her."

Marty bustled herself with examining the produce sent from Rosebank and, after that, went to telephone Dilys. Rhoda told her niece not to bother with any more chores.

"You've done enough, my lamb. I've only got to see to the poodles." She added a piece of advice concerning the changed situation. "It doesn't look to me as though everything is going to be honey as Marty imagines, but whether those two come together or not, your best plan is to write off Stephen Partridge right now. That Melanie will cling like ruddy ivy on a wall, so you don't want to waste your time on him. Alderman Price's son is a far better proposition for you."

Jennifer laughed and said, "I'll be all right." Then she made her way to the morning-room, glad to find her father alone, at last and have a chance to ask him about the weekend.

"Meadows is a senile nitwit! All he did was to make stupid jokes about Tremynach and advise me to hand over our museum to the Town Council."

"Oh, Daddy, I am so sorry! You look tired. Things won't seem so black in the morning."

"Tomorrow morning I must talk to Partridge. I never thought he could be such a scoundrel, but I shall soon make him behave properly to his wife and children. Is that Marty calling you, darling?"

"Aren't you coming to speak to Dilys?" asked Marty. "She is waiting to have a word with you. I'm just going upstairs to see if our little visitor has settled her babies. Then I'll bring her down and we can all have a cosy chat before we go to bed."

Jonathan's plan next morning was to take Melanie, Johnny and Unity, to the museum, with Jennifer. He wanted her to mind the children, while Melanie waited in the Committee room, and he interviewed Stephen. After that, instructed by

Jonathan, the erring husband would ask his wife for forgiveness.

The children were curiously passive about the whole business, intrigued by the museum, not by any thought of the father whom they had not seen for nearly two years. This was only to be expected, thought Jennifer, as she took them in to the Natural History section and let them scramble on the stuffed walrus's back, just as dear Mr. A. T. N. Jones used to allow her to do.

Meanwhile Jonathan escorted Melanie upstairs to the Committee Room, used by him as a private office and study.

"As soon as I have talked to your husband, I shall send him to you."

"You are so very, very kind, Mr. Evans. I've never, in all my life, met anyone so kind as you."

Jonathan gave her an encouraging smile.

"Don't worry, my dear. Everything will be all right."

He prided himself on his power of organisation, but in this situation he was unaware of one important factor, namely Stephen Partridge's determination not to have anything to do with wife and children. This came as a profound shock when Jonathan realised it. He was also amazed that he should meet with resistance to his commands. He looked upon the curator as clever and competent in museum work, but had never regarded him as an individual capable of strong emotion. Stephen's pallid complexion and the lack of colour in eyes and hair were responsible to a certain extent for Jonathan Evans' assumption that he was weak and passive. Unless he became animated, Stephen did give the effect of an under-developed print from a poor negative, blurred and shadowy.

When Jonathan entered the room, the curator rose with his usual correct, "Good morning, sir."

"I have something of importance to say to you, Mr. Partridge," began Jonathan.

He sat down and motioned to his employee to do the same,

but Stephen remained standing in an attitude that indicated respectful attention. The air vibrated with vague uneasiness. Jonathan stiffened his back and began the homily.

"Your wife and children are here, in this building," he announced in a stern tone. "Yesterday I made their acquaintance during a journey from London, and they stayed at my house last night. I understand Mrs. Partridge wishes to be reconciled with you and resume her married life. She is now waiting upstairs in the Committee room, so I wish you to go to her immediately, and, Mr. Partridge . . . Jonathan paused impressively for the words to sink in. Then he added, "Mr. Partridge, if you wish to continue in my employ you must accede to your wife's wishes and make a home in Tremynach for her and your children. It goes without saying you will resume your duties as a husband and a father."

Never for a moment had Jonathan Evans expected such a reaction to his commands. Stephen's face turned even whiter than usual and his eyes appeared like pin points of pale grey steel behind the spectacles. He burst into a torrent of invectives against his wife who was pursuing him, against fate that had caused him to marry when he was fundamentally a celibate type, and against the threats of an interfering tyrant. His employer did not recognise himself under this designation.

"Keep your bloody job! If living with my damned wife and those infernal kids is the price I've got to pay for this job, then you can sack me right now."

He quivered from head to foot. Jonathan Evans was aghast at the unexpected outburst.

"I consider you the most appalling cad I have ever encountered. You take on lifelong responsibilities and throw them aside as lightly as . . . as . . ."

Somehow he failed to think of a suitable simile. Then Stephen flopped down into a chair and began to cry like a woman, which was more than Jonathan could endure. Anxious to escape from any further unseemly display of emotion, he

told his curator once again where Melanie was waiting.

"You are to go to her as soon as you have gained control of yourself, and I trust that will not be long. Your behaviour is absolutely despicable."

Jonathan made for the door, but on reaching it, he said, "Partridge, I insist on you going to join your wife upstairs within the next quarter of an hour." He would have used the words "at once", but deemed it advisable to give the husband time to pull himself together.

It was too early for visitors to be admitted to the museum, so Jonathan found only Jennifer and the children in the Natural History section. At the sight of him, Johnny triumphantly clambered on the walrus.

"Fine, fine," declared Jonathan. "That is something we only allow very special people to do."

"There's a crocodile in that corner and it's got hundreds and hundreds of teeth."

"And a big, big mouth," added Unity.

From her father's signals, Jennifer gathered that he wanted to be alone with her, so she asked Johnny how far he had learnt to count. When he said proudly, "Up to twenty", she told him to take Unity to the other end of the gallery and count the number of baby hedgehogs in a case.

"You know what a hedgehog is like, don't you?"

Finding Johnny had never seen such a creature, she took him along, with Unity following. Leaving both children to perform this task, she hurried back to Jonathan who described with horror the scene he had had with Stephen.

"He behaved like a maniac. I was shocked at such lack of restraint. As for display of temper! I am very disappointed in Partridge."

Jennifer was too accustomed to Stephen's queer moods to be surprised at the outburst, and she was astonished to find how ignorant her father had been of the real Stephen Partridge. She accepted his violent temper, his changeableness, as well

as his sarcasm, but Jonathan had evidently taken it for granted that the curator was a studious, amenable person. Jennifer tried to make excuses.

"I daresay he will be different when he meets Melanie, Daddy, at least when he gets over the shock and has had time to get adjusted."

"Six," announced Johnny. "And I counted them six times."

"Six baby 'edge'ogs," declared Unity.

Jonathan asked Jennifer to go and see if Melanie—for he called her Melanie now, not Mrs. Partridge—needed her.

"If that man has not turned up, let me know. I told him to go to the Committee room. These two scamps can stay with me. Have you ever seen a seal, Johnny? Look at this big fellow. He lives in the sea all the time and doesn't come near land."

Jonathan's zoological knowledge was scantier than his curator's. Jennifer heard her father give this wrong information and longed to correct it, but was too afraid of betraying how much she had recently learnt concerning the habits of seals. She felt guilty whenever she remembered her trip to West Wales.

She went upstairs to the so-called Committee room. It was no use listening at the door to discover if the couple were talking inside, for Noah Tomlinson's builder had put thick massive doors throughout the museum. There was no possibility of hearing any sound from within. She knocked loudly, then entered.

Stephen was there, looking like some wrathful spectre, and Melanie sat mopping her eyes.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you only . . ."

"You're not interrupting," said Stephen. "I'm just going to return to my office to continue my work in peace and privacy. You can tell your bullying father that I am not having Melanie and those blasted kids in my office or my digs."

"Stephen, don't talk like that. Wait till Melanie has been

in Tremynach a little while. Then you can discuss things rationally. Don't decide anything now."

"I have decided." He turned to his wife. "You are not getting a penny from me until you go back to London and take those brats with you."

"Johnny and Unity are downstairs, Stephen," said Jennifer. "Do see them."

"I will not," screamed Stephen. "I never wanted John or Unity. It's she who would have them and she can damned well look after them. Keep them away from me!" And he rushed out of the room.

Melanie continued to sob and Jennifer tried to console her by saying that Stephen would be better when he got over the shock of the unexpected arrival.

"Stephen is horrid—perfectly horrid! He won't hear of us coming to his lodgings. Oh, isn't it awful! Where can my poor little children and I lay our heads tonight?"

"What is wrong with Derwen? Of course you must stay with us until you've been able to come to a decision about the future." And Jennifer added without much conviction. "Stephen will soon be all right and arrange something for you."

Stephen showed no sign of doing anything for his wife and family, and the stalemate continued. Melanie had enough sense to avoid him when she came to the museum, and, on these occasions, she left Johnny and Unity at Derwen. They seemed very happy there and everyone, especially Rhoda, was kind to them. Jonathan continued to fuss over Johnny, but ignored Unity. His devotion to the boy was so extraordinary that both his sisters, as well as Jennifer, marvelled at it.

"Never, never have I seen your father rave over a child since you were a little girl," remarked Marty. "What has come over him?"

"I suppose it is just that Johnny has taken Daddy's fancy."

Rhoda told her niece that she ought to hurry up and marry and have a few babies, advice that Jennifer received with a laugh and hastily escaped before hints could be dropped about Gerald Price.

Left alone with Rhoda, Marty said that she had not realised Jonathan could have such a soft spot for children.

"The soft spot is limited to Johnny. He doesn't bother with Unity."

"I suppose poor Jonathan always wanted a son. That wretched creature he married—such a sad, sad tragedy! I often think his life has been warped through Vera Lorimer. We were so mistaken in thinking her the right wife for Jonathan. Mama was as much taken in by her as anyone."

"Vera got round Mother by buttering her up with grand family nonsense, but Ted and I never believed it."

"It is a pity Dilys doesn't have any little ones."

Rhoda agreed, only pointed out that their brother would not make much fuss of any children produced by Dilys.

"No, I'm afraid he wouldn't," sighed Marty.

Dilys took a great liking to Melanie at the very first meeting. She came to Derwen a week after the arrival of the Partridge family and immediately wanted them to spend a day at Rosebank, so it was arranged that Jennifer should borrow her father's car and take them. Jonathan was also invited but, as usual, he made an excuse for not going.

The visit was a great success. Melanie went into raptures over house and garden, gadgets and improvements, while the children earned their hostess's praise for model behaviour. They did not rush about the house knocking things over. In the garden they kept strictly to the paths, hardly daring to walk on the lawn. They did not damage flowers outside, nor furniture inside. At the table they sat up straight and ate their food carefully without dropping crumbs.

Dilys told Melanie they were beautifully brought up and very different from the child of David's cousin. He had recently

been to Rosebank, left chocolate smears on a satin-upholstered chair, broken a cup from a set of china that had belonged to David's mother, and, had finally upset a box of dahlia tubers carefully graded by David and stored in the greenhouse.

Any mother is pleased by compliments, on the good behaviour of her children, and these about Johnny and Unity certainly made Melanie's day. When Dilys was out of the room, she said to Jennifer how much she liked "your sister." Dilys and she got on the subject of ages, and Jennifer learnt that Melanie was thirty-five, three years older than herself. They could not compare children when Dilys had none, while husbands could hardly be discussed as Melanie's was proving so difficult. She prattled away, giving her impressions of Tremynach which she thought a most interesting town.

"I'm reading Mr. Evans' local history, and I'm thrilled to the core. I love history. I mean, I feel it is so real. And Tremynach teems with history."

Her audience recognised the last phrase as a favourite one of Jonathan's.

Eager to hear about Gerald, Dilys waited until she could get her sister alone. She had too much respect for a confidence to mention him in front of Melanie. When she and Jennifer did have a few minutes together, she was very disappointed to find there had been no meeting since the Pembrokeshire weekend. Reluctantly, she accepted her sister's statement that there was "nothing in it."

Jennifer was conscious of a distinct coolness on Gerald's side at the conclusion of their visit to Pwllgwaun Farm. When he said goodbye on Monday morning he explained, rather markedly, that he intended to return by a different route from the one she would be taking. There was no need for that. Although driving different cars, they could have gone as far as Neath before their paths diverged and they could have stopped and had coffee together. Oh well, if that was how he

felt! She considered he was extremely rude and most unkind the night before. Fancy telling her all she wanted was a life of ease like that Issachar in the Bible!

She had not thought Gerald would be so peeved because she refused to reconsider marrying him. One expected sulks from a neurotic, unbalanced man like Stephen who suffered badly from nerves and could not be expected to control his temper. Gerald was supposed to have undergone an iron test of control during his Arctic experiences and, here he was, acting like a spoilt child of Johnny's age. Still, it was better if he avoided her in future. Friendship could only give rise to gossip and complications that she did not want.

The situation between Stephen and Melanie remained static and, so far, Jonathan had not carried out his threat of dismissal. He told Jennifer he thought it unwise to take drastic action without first giving the curator a chance to be reasonable, and Jennifer readily agreed. She guessed her father was aware that to deprive Stephen of his job would only separate the couple further. As for Melanie, she was apparently content to wait for the time when Stephen would agree to do as she wished. Until that day, she was happy to continue as a guest at Derwen.

Jennifer could not object to Melanie's prolonged stay, but she found it increasingly irksome to share her father's company with a third person. Jonathan took to showing Melanie and the children the country around and though Jennifer sat beside him in the car front seat, it was not the same with three passengers in the back. In the evenings, he would play games with Johnny until the latter's bedtime, then, unless the television was interesting, he would talk to Melanie about Tremynach's past or about Welsh culture and literature. Jennifer joined in, trying to stifle the wish to have him alone, except for Aunt Marty nodding in an armchair opposite. Rhoda did not care much for television and was accustomed to spend a good deal of time in her own bedroom, reading and talking

to the poodles whom Jonathan would not have in the morning-room when he was there.

It had all been so cosy before Melanie came. Jennifer began to long for the time when life at Derwen, and at the museum, would revert to the old routine.

Chapter Nine

WHEN OCTOBER changed to November and Jennifer had not caught a glimpse of Gerald, she decided his father must have been persuaded to spare him to go to Eire as he wanted. Then she heard Alderman Price telling this to Mrs. J. D. Jones. Jennifer was helping Aunt Marty with a coffee evening at the chapel, given to raise money for charity.

"After seals is Gerald. Not shooting them, Mrs. J. D., but studying their ways on some island in the west of Ireland. Gerald is going to write a book about them, he says, so maybe we'll see him on the telly one of these days. Queer sort of hobby is this nature study, but I can't keep the boy away from it. Real keen he is."

"Indeed, but it is very good of you to spare him from the Emporium like this."

"I can't rightly spare him, but you know what young fellows are nowadays, always wanting to be on the go, and if you interfere you're called a tyrant. But I've told the boy he's got to come home next weekend. I've fixed up for Mr. Howells to go on some fancy window dressing course. That was Gerald's idea and he knows I can't do without Howells and him together. Full of modern notions about improving my business is Gerald. Not that I mind. Shows he is keen on the Em-

porium, wanting an assistant to have this training so that my windows will look like some grand London shop."

Jennifer hovered round with coffee pot and cakes and biscuits, hoping to hear more; but Mrs. J. D. Jones was on the all-absorbing theme of a visit next April or May from friends of her son's. The prospect of making some return for the hospitality shown to Tal by these Americans was already weighing upon the minister's wife, and had become a recurring topic of conversation with her.

Melanie had not come to the coffee evening. She was at Derwen where she and Jonathan were working on his book, for she had read the manuscript as far as it went and had suggested several improvements. Jonathan told Jennifer that she was a very clever young woman.

"She is clever as well as charming. I simply cannot understand Partridge's abominable behaviour. Well, I intend to leave matters as they are for a little longer, but not indefinitely. Soon I shall speak to him again and unless he shows signs of doing his duty, I shall take serious action."

Jennifer tried to be sympathetic towards Melanie but found it difficult when she was really so sorry for Stephen. He was obviously in a nervy, depressed state, unable to concentrate, complaining of headaches, complaining that Melanie was trying to wear him down. He could not sleep at nights, or if he did he had horrible nightmares, and Jennifer heard over and over again the details of his old dream that he said haunted him, the dream when he fell down in a forest and was unable to struggle to his feet.

"There are great weights pressing on me and crushing me to death. I feel as if I am passing out. Putrefaction—ugh!—I hate the thought of it. This museum is like a charnel house with those corpses downstairs."

He was referring to the Egyptian case he abhorred because of the mummies. One day he said to Jennifer that he had great difficulty in forcing himself to walk past it.

"I shall do something awful some day. I know I shall."

"Stephen, you ought to see a doctor about your nerves. You can't go on like this."

"I've been to a doctor for sleeping pills and I've had stuff from him for my headaches, but what's the use when I know this badgering from Melanie is the reason for my nerves and my bad dreams. I'm too highly-strung to put up with this horrible situation. But she won't see my point of view."

"Try her way for a bit. I know you find children worrying, but Johnny and Unity are darlings, and so well-behaved."

"Don't you start," Stephen shouted. "I'd sooner kill myself than live with Melanie and those kids. I'm a celibate type. I should never have let her wheedle me into marriage. I can't stand this bloody connubial bliss. I must be left alone."

Jennifer gave up trying to persuade Stephen to be more reasonable. She was very worried about him, fearing he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. At last she told Melanie this, but the look in Melanie's eyes made Jennifer wish she had not spoken. She could read the suspicion that her anxiety about Stephen was caused by more than mere friendly concern.

"He says he has dreadful headaches and the most frightful nightmares."

"Dear me, you are his pet confidante," sneered Melanie. •

"Can't you persuade him to see a specialist?"

Melanie dismissed the matter with a scornful laugh and declared that Stephen had always been hysterical about himself. Jennifer felt thoroughly squashed. •

I wish she would give up and go back to London.

It was very inhospitable to harbour such a wish, but Jennifer was yearning for the time when she would have her father to herself again. With a guest in the house—and a guest so popular with him—it was inevitable that she always had to share Jonathan's company, and she was sick of doing this.

Jennifer also found it annoying when she heard Melanie

giving advice, as over the price demanded for Nebo chapel. This, said Melanie, was exorbitant, and though Jonathan had once decided to accept the figure, he now instructed his solicitor to offer a lower sum. Mr. Rees Williams was unwilling to do this, hinting that there might be other would-be purchasers, but, prompted by Melanie, Jonathan rejected the advice. Jennifer thought her father was acting foolishly, but when she attempted to influence him to buy without haggling, he told her curtly to leave the decision to him.

The Town Council's offer to take over the Tomlinson Memorial Museum was sent to Jonathan while negotiations between his solicitor and the Nebo trustees were still dragging on. A letter from the Town Clerk stated that the Council had resolved to build an art gallery on a new central site and wished to combine this with the Tomlinson Memorial Museum. Provided both museum and Noah Tomlinson's trust fund were given to the town, the Council was prepared to assume full responsibility for the continued existence of such a valued institution.

Jonathan was furious. How dare the Town Council ask him to relinquish control of his family museum? How dare local councillors propose merging it with a municipal art gallery? He had heard that Alderman Price wanted Tremyach to have an art gallery, so branded him as evil instigator of this offer.

Jennifer read the letter. It struck her that the new central site mentioned could hardly be Abelstown Tip, which was some distance from the town centre, but she said nothing, knowing her opinion was not wanted. Her father, having exhausted his abuse of the alderman, was already listening to Melanie's suggestions for a devastating reply.

Jennifer saw the composition before it was posted and privately felt it to be rude and undignified. That was how she described it to herself. She was ashamed to think of Alderman Price seeing such a letter, for it certainly would come into his

hands. After all, Gerald's father was only trying to do his best for the town in establishing an art gallery, and most likely he considered the Tomlinson Memorial Museum would benefit by coming under the local authority." But it was impossible for a man so prejudiced as her father to allow the alderman credit for any good intentions, and Jennifer prayed that she would not encounter Gerald until long after the reply had been read to the Town Council and forgotten.

Gerald was back in Tremynach. She gathered that from Aunt Marty, who gave her the news with a wistful, confident-in-me-darling air, but Jennifer only tried to show agreeable detachment. Why must her aunts fuss about marriage when all she wanted was the exclusive companionship of her adored father?

Marty left the room and Rhoda opened fire.

"Not doing much about Boy Friend, are you, my lamb? Surely you aren't expecting him to come running after you? Young men don't do that sort of thing now, that's if they ever did. I know I had to work hard to bring Ted up to scratch. It's concentration and real effort that gets a husband, and you don't try. You'll be sorry one of these days when it's too late."

When Jennifer tried to convince her aunt that she was not interested in Gerald Price as a husband, Rhoda extended the lecture.

"I hope you are not waiting for Stephen Partridge to get free. Personally, I wouldn't stake a bob on his chances. That Melanie is putting on the pincers, slowly but surely, and in the end she'll close them on him, poor dab! He won't escape from her."

Melanie was certainly a woman of great determination and she was now suspicious of an affair between Stephen and Jennifer. That, she thought, was really behind Stephen's refusal to take her back or have anything to do with his children. He had not seen Johnny and Unity for nearly two years, and

she wondered if she confronted him with them, fatherly love and pride would be aroused, with subsequent capitulation. Melanie was quite unable to grasp the fact that her husband had no parental feelings. It was something beyond her comprehension. She had wanted children and the status of motherhood was something she prized very highly. It was the crown to a marriage, linking a couple in an unbreakable chain, and it puzzled her that Stephen had not looked upon Johnny and Unity as a bond between him and her. Now he ignored them because he was in love with Jennifer Evans. Make him see them and he would come to his senses.

She said nothing at Derwen but, one afternoon she slipped out of the house with them, caught a bus, and went straight into the curator's office at the museum. The result was disastrous, for sight of the children sent Stephen into a maniacal fury, and he stormed, raged, even threatened murder if she dared to do such a thing again. She had insisted on producing the brats and they were her responsibility.

"Get out, before I kill you all!"

It was mild and sunny, although the middle of November, and the windows were open. Jennifer, who happened to be walking along the street, just underneath, heard Stephen's voice raised to high pitch and screaming at somebody within. Alarmed, she dashed into the building, up the stairs, and into the curator's office, to find husband and wife hurling abuse at each other while two terrified children clung to their mother.

"Get out! Get out! Don't come near me again, or I'll do something desperate. I mean it, you damned fool! Take yourself and those brats out of my sight for ever!"

Somehow, Jennifer propelled the three out of the office and, thinking it advisable to get them back to Derwen before her father found out, she suggested she drove them home. Melanie meekly consented. They went to the car park, and Jennifer soon got them out of the way. Leaving Melanie with the frightened children, she returned to the museum, hoping her father

was still in his room. It would be disastrous if he learnt about the incident and peremptorily sacked his curator. Dismissal would ruin Melanie's reconciliation campaign and Jennifer dared not contemplate the effect it would have on Stephen.

She tried Stephen's door but it was locked. She made her way to the library and busied herself with work there for quite an hour, and then she was interrupted by her father entering the room.

"Did you know about this outrage of Partridge? I have told Thomas to put back the exhibits in the case exactly as they were before. If Marty thought they were in store she would be deeply hurt, and Partridge knows that. I told him so when he wanted to meddle with the arrangement before. Absolute flagrant disregard of my orders, and I will not tolerate such insubordination!"

Jennifer first thought that Jonathan had heard about the recent scene, but she soon realised Stephen had done something else, something that naturally annoyed her father. She was well aware of Stephen's unreasonable horror of the Egyptian mummies given by a relative of Marty's husband, and therefore sacrosanct in Marty's eyes. Stephen once asked if he could banish them to a storeroom and Jonathan refused. Now Stephen had taken the law into his own hands, and made Mr. Thomas the caretaker change the objects in that particular case. It was a ridiculous thing to do, but Jennifer, knowing what a state Stephen was in, could excuse him for running amok.

Not so Jonathan, who met Mr. Thomas carrying away the last mummy, asked what on earth he was doing, heard the story, countermanded Stephen's instructions, and left the caretaker restoring the mummies to their original positions. Stephen, it transpired, had gone home to nurse a bad headache. His absence was the last straw and Jonathan blazing with rage, refused to listen to Jennifer's pleas on behalf of the curator.

"Partridge can enjoy his bad headache for the rest of today, but tomorrow I shall deal with him as he deserves. Wait till I've made a telephone call to Rees, and then we'll go home."

Jennifer went down to the entrance hall and, finding Mr. Thomas there, asked why he did not stop Stephen from doing such a stupid mad thing as to interfere with the Egyptian case. Mr. Thomas said he was powerless. He had to do as he was told.

"Mr. Partridge has always been queer about those mummies, and, really Miss Evans, his nerves do seem to have got awful. The wife and I were only talking about him last night. It's a proper brain specialist he should see, if you want my opinion."

Mr. Thomas looked so serious that Jennifer made another attempt to bring Melanie to a realisation of her husband's mental state.

But Melanie was unmoved. She could only express her bitter resentment of Stephen's treatment of her and the children, culminating in today's scene.

"I know he was dreadful, Melanie, but he is ill, so you must make allowances."

"Stephen can put on a marvellous act, especially if he thinks he has a sympathetic audience, and you certainly seem taken in by him. I know Stephen. I've had years of his nonsense."

It was on the tip of Jennifer's tongue to ask Melanie why she wanted to have years more of her husband if that was how she felt about him.

"I haven't told Mr. Evans about the filthy way Stephen treated us this afternoon," went on Melanie. "Mr. Evans is so terribly angry over the mummies and he's going to make it pretty hot for Stephen tomorrow. A good thing, say I! It is time Mr. Evans put the screw on Stephen."

"Stephen has always hated the mummies. He seems to have an obsession about them."

"What hasn't he got an obsession about? He likes to be thought a crank. It's all put on."

"I don't think he is responsible for half he says and does," persisted Jennifer. "Honestly, Melánie, I'm afraid he is heading for a nervous breakdown."

"That would just suit him."

"Couldn't you persuade him to see a doctor and you explain how ill he really is? Oh, I know he has been to a doctor and got pills for headaches and sleeplessness, but I don't think he has told the truth. If you rang up someone like Dr. Williams and gave details about Stephen's state, and then made Stephen go with you, then I'm sure Dr. Williams would send him to a specialist for proper treatment."

"You do worry yourself about my husband."

"But Melanie, I'm sure he's ill—mentally ill."

"And I know better. All this is an act. Stephen wants to get out of the responsibility of me and the children. He wants a divorce. I've a pretty good idea now why he is so keen on that, but I shall fight against it, and, you see, I'll win. He's my husband, and he's not going to back out of marriage or hound me out of Tremynach. He'll come round in time."

"That may take a long time."

"I can wait."

"Perhaps you'll get tired of waiting."

"I suppose you are getting tired of having us at Derwen. Is that what you mean?"

"Of course not," lied Jennifer. "You know you are welcome to stay here as long as you want, and we all love Johnny and Unity. They're no trouble."

She took it for granted that speech satisfied Melanie and dropped the thorny subject of Stephen's health, so it was a shock when Jonathan took her aside that evening and reproached her for having made Melanie feel she was no longer wanted at Derwen. It took some time to convince him that she had not intended to be inhospitable.

"Melanie must have misunderstood you. She is such a sensitive girl. But I knew you could not have meant to be unkind."

Jonathan actually put his arm on his daughter's shoulder, a gesture he had not made for weeks, called her darling, and told her not to worry because he would soon reassure Melanie.

Jennifer seized this favourable opportunity to confide in him about Stephen's bad nervous state, but, like Melanie, Jonathan refused to consider the possibility of mental illness. When she pressed the point, he only became impatient.

"My dear Jennifer, what do you know about nervous breakdowns and the like? If Partridge is suffering from anything, it is guilty conscience through trying to shuffle out of his matrimonial responsibilities, but he is not going to dilly-dally with me any longer. I have exercised great patience and restraint, but this studied defiance, this interference with that Egyptian case is the end. Tomorrow morning he gets a final ultimatum. Unless he does as Melanie wants at once, then I shall sack him."

Jennifer pleaded that losing the museum curatorship would not solve the problem. Stephen would then have no money to make a home for his wife and children.

"I have been talking to Melanie and she is willing for me to take that risk. If Partridge persists in his foolish defiance, then I have told her she can have the job instead. At least she will be financially independent of him and able to support herself and the children. She will make an excellent curator, with her past museum experience."

Jennifer was aghast. She dare not protest against her father's proposal. She did point out that the breach between Stephen and Melanie would then be final. Apparently Melanie realised that.

"She wants me to do something, whether action brings Partridge to heel or not. But whatever happens, she won't divorce him, and I think she is right. He'll climb down though. Like all cowards, he will see when he is licked."

Jonathan went to the museum immediately after breakfast, without waiting for his daughter or guest, as was his usual habit. When Jennifer asked Melanie about going to the museum, Melanie said she was stopping at Derwen with the children, so Jennifer went by bus alone. She arrived an hour after her father and, guessing the interview was over, she hurried to the curator's office.

Stephen, white and agitated, ordered her to get out, and when she hesitated he started to push her. He refused to speak to her, so acceptance of this exclusion was the only thing to be done. Later in the morning, she found out from Mr. Thomas that Mr. Partridge had gone home with another of his bad headaches. Jennifer toyed with the idea of following Stephen to his lodgings, but was afraid of Melanie getting to hear of that and her belief in an affair being strengthened. Rather silly! Why should Melanie discover a visit to Davies Street? Jennifer scolded herself for panicking about nothing. She went to get her hat and coat, but was stopped by a visitor wanting information and, by the time she satisfied him, she came to the conclusion it was better to leave Stephen alone until he was calmer.

Next morning at Derwen, during breakfast, the front door bell rang. Jennifer went to answer it and found a police sergeant and a constable standing on the steps. They asked to speak to Mr. Evans, so she ushered them into the library and fetched her father.

An instinctive feeling that something was wrong made Jennifer linger in the hall instead of going back to finish her breakfast. She was thankful she did for Jonathan came out of the library and, seeing her there, called her and took her back into the room with him. In the stress of the moment, he spoke to her in his old affectionate way.

"I need your help, darling. I want you to break some terrible news to poor Melanie. Stephen Partridge is dead. It looks as though he has committed suicide."

Chapter Ten

THE VERDICT given on Stephen Partridge was death due to barbiturate poisoning, self-administered, while the balance of mind was disturbed. It transpired at the inquest that he had been prescribed tablets for sleeplessness by the doctor, but could not have taken them as ordered for he had managed to accumulate a large number. His landlady testified to noticing the almost full bottle on his dressing-table the morning before he died, and it was empty when he was found dead.

There was no doubt about Stephen's intention to commit suicide. He left behind a long rambling letter explaining his reasons for taking that drastic step, and, from the wild statements he made and from evidence of the landlady, it was plain that he was mentally ill. A verdict was soon given.

Jennifer was deeply affected. She was careful to conceal her feelings so as not to give Melanie further grounds for suspicion of a love affair. Jennifer knew she would not have married Stephen, if he had wanted her and had been free, but Melanie would not believe that. Nor would she believe that Jennifer only admired her husband's work as museum curator and found him a pleasant colleague.

Poor Stephen! Jennifer blamed herself for not having done more to rouse Melanie and her father to an understanding of his sick state. She had tried, had failed, but now she felt she

ought to have persevered further. It was such a terrible tragedy.

When she went to break the news to Melanie she imagined Melanie would suffer agonies of remorse for having scoffed at his nerves, but the first reaction was one of incredulity.

"Stephen would never, never do such a thing. It's just a mean tale that he has spread round to scare me."

"I'm sorry, Melanie, but this isn't a tale."

There was a knock at the door and Jonathan entered. The concern in his eyes made it clear that something terrible really had happened.

Melanie said stubbornly, "It's not true. It can't be true."

Jonathan took her hand, called her my poor child, and said she could rely on his help. He urged her to be brave for Johnny's sake. As usual, he forgot Unity. Melanie burst into wild hysterical shrieks that brought in Marty and Rhoda. Marty cried too, kissed her and said how she herself had suffered through losing her own husband, thus making Melanie worse. Rhoda took command and, with Jennifer's help, got her to bed. The doctor arrived and quietened her with a sedative.

Jennifer was busy the rest of that day, helping Jonathan with forthcoming inquest and funeral formalities, but after that Melanie recovered sufficiently to do all that was required of her. She insisted at once on the children returning to Derwen. Rees Williams' wife had taken them to stay with her and Jennifer felt it would have been wiser to leave them there a few days, but Melanie said she must have them with her.

She did not tell them their father was dead, only that he had gone on a long, long journey and would be away a long time, so they must be extra good and look after poor lonely Mummy.

"Johnny will have to take Daddy's place and be a real little man, won't you darling?"

Johnny gave a dutiful nod. Daddy was a remote, terrifying creature to him and his sister. He was only four and Unity two when the couple separated, and the recent interview with Stephen had scared him dreadfully. As far as Johnny was concerned, Daddy could go on a long journey and not come back. Unity thought the same. Both looked frightened by their mother's grief-stricken appearance, so Jennifer got them away as soon as she could. A walk round the garden with the poodles cheered them up.

Dilys arrived, full of concern about Melanie.

She said to Jennifer, "I'm married so I can understand how she feels. If anything happened to David, life would be over for me. Poor, poor Melanie! Where is she?"

Jennifer took Dilys upstairs to the bedroom, and was surprised that Melanie should fling her arms round her sister and seem genuinely glad to see her. It was unusual, too, for Dilys to display such emotion.

Jonathan spared Melanie all he could in connection with the inquest. Once that was over, the funeral followed, and Melanie, according to English custom, insisted on attending the actual burial, a thing not usually done by women in Wales. Marty disapproved, but Rhoda and Jennifer went with her to the cemetery.

It was taken for granted that Melanie and the children should stay at Derwen for the present. Jennifer knew her father intended to offer Melanie the post of museum curator, only she hoped desperately that Melanie would then take a flat, or even buy a house, in Tremynach. But the appointment was accepted and nothing was said about moving.

"Mr. Evans has been wonderful to me, simply wonderful, and so have you, Jennifer, and your dear aunts. I think I should have done the same as Stephen if I hadn't got you dear kind people to back me up. I mean, it is going to be a terrible responsibility to bring up my poor little darlings all on my own."

Surely, with a curator's salary, Melanie could afford to pay for a flat in Tremynach, or even rooms, but leaving Derwen did not seem to be under consideration by either her or Jonathan. Jennifer sunk into black depression when she first faced the possibility that Melanie was likely to be there permanently. She dared not give her father any hint of her feelings about this prospect. There was nothing she could do but accept the situation. She had the impression at first that her aunts did not mind, but she was wrong. Rhoda resented Melanie's continued presence and confided her fears for the future to Marty.

"Once I can get good prices and good homes for the poodles, I shall start to look for a job and clear out. I daresay I can land something or other—even at my age. I've never touched the insurance policy Ted made me take out, so thank God I've got that to fall back on."

"Why are you talking like that?" asked Marty.

"Because I do not want to live here when Madame Melanie marries our esteemed brother. Melanie as mistress of Derwen is more than I could stomach."

"Mistress of Derwen! Don't be so ridiculous, Rhoda."

"That is precisely what is going to happen."

"Never! How can you imagine Jonathan would marry again, and certainly not a drab, dowdy, little object like Melanie Partridge."

"Being drab and dowdy doesn't stop her turning those soulful eyes on Jonathan. She's got a bagful of tricks, and she's fixed him all right, only he doesn't see it yet. Just wait until the respectable period of mourning is over, and you'll have Widow Melanie becoming Mrs. Jonathan Tomlinson Evans the Second."

"You're crazy! Jonathan, of all men! He doesn't notice women."

"He does this one," said Rhoda.

"But she isn't the type to attract him," persisted Marty.

"Look how badly she dresses and she isn't pretty. Jonathan

used to be so proud of Vera's smartness and her beauty."

"Perhaps he had enough of smart and beautiful females with Vera," returned Rhoda. She added sadly, "It's Jennifer I'm worried about. Jonathan's marriage to Melanie is going to put her nose completely out of joint."

"It would be an abominable thing for all of us. Fancy me no longer mistress of our old home and supplanted by that little upstart! Why, I should go crazy."

"I shall say goodbye to Derwen and take to the road."

"Where can you go at your age?"

"Not Preswylfa," said Rhoda, referring to a local home for elderly women. "I shall sell the poodles and look for a job in social work, like I had before."

"Can't you warn Jonathan? You've always stood up to him. Point out to him that Melanie is chasing him and how disastrous it would be if he married her."

"Rhoda saw her sister was really upset. It showed how shaken Marty was when she mistrusted her own influence over Jonathan, an influence that had hitherto been all-powerful. Evidently she was afraid of tackling him herself.

"It's no good," said Rhoda. "You cannot talk a man into keeping at bay a woman who is pursuing him. He is too flattered by the attention to discourage her. No, Marty, if you or I told Jonathan what an artful pest Melanie is, we should simply be pushing him into her arms all the quicker. We can only let events take their course, and make our own plans before the balloon bursts."

"I'm positive Jonathan isn't in love with her."

"He's well on the way to being in love. I'm afraid you'll have to face the facts."

"I don't believe in such facts. You've only to look at the difference in their ages to see how absurd your prophecies are."

"A difference like that doesn't matter."

"Talk about May and December!"

"Melanie says she is thirty-five, and that isn't exactly May. You can't call Jonathan December either. He won't be sixty till February."

Marty did a rapid calculation and said that was twenty-five years difference. Rhoda still maintained that the gap did not matter. Marty grew irritable and told her to keep her silly ideas to herself and certainly not worry Jennifer with them.

"I'm damned sorry for Jennifer," declared Rhoda. "All her life she's made a god of Jonathan, and now she's going to be badly hurt."

Jennifer was finding life at the museum trying with Melanie as curator. Not that Jennifer had had ambitions for the post. She was far too humble to believe herself to be capable of filling it since her museum experience was limited to that gained in the Tomlinson Memorial Museum. But there was an unexplainable soreness, something she tried to crush, as she showed Melanie round Stephen's office and endeavoured to describe his routine methods and his files.

Once established, Melanie did not concern herself much with routine duties, leaving most of these to Jennifer. She opened the letters each morning, dealt with the most important, then went to study local material in the Tremynach gallery, or sat in the Committee room with Jonathan, helping him with his second book on the town's history. Melanie was an efficient typist, so Jennifer found her assistance was not even needed for typing her father's drafts.

It was a new experience to feel unwanted, and one under which Jennifer suffered acutely. She resented the increasing comradeship between Melanie and her father, although she tried and tried to minimise the strength of this intimacy, telling herself things would return to normal when Melanie became less conscious of widowhood. Her father was sorry for Melanie having to bear the tragedy of Stephen's death, as well as earn a living and bring up two little children. He wanted to make

life easier and help them, especially Johnny on whom he doted. Jennifer kept urging herself to be patient and understand, and in time everything would come all right.

By that she meant that her father would be less absorbed in Melanie, that Melanie would find other living accommodation, and that the situation at the museum would revert to what it was in Stephen's time. Then the curator worked in the curator's office, only going to Jonathan's room when summoned or with urgent business. Jennifer used to help Stephen unless she had more pressing work, such as typing, reading, or discussing local history with her father, or helping him to check new material for the book on hand. Wonderful, happy, days! In her heart she had the secret fear that they would never return.

One afternoon she was looking for a pair of candlesticks on loan but not wanted for display by Stephen who wrapped them up and pushed them into a storeroom drawer. That morning, the owner wrote asking for their return, and Jennifer had to hunt for them. At the same time she also came across some Russian sleigh bells that had been great favourites of hers as a child. She was about to shake them to enjoy the lovely silvery jingle when Melanie came into the room, asking if she had found the loan.

"That's a mercy!" declared Melanie. "Now will you write and tell the Mrs. Doodle-da—what is she? Oh, Davies or Jones, I suppose! Well, let her know when she can collect them. I can't stop now because Mr. Evans is taking me to see that quaint old Spaniard in Bonwylla. We need a lot more picturesque details from him, far more than Mr. Evans managed to get when he saw him in September."

Jennifer remembered that visit only too well. Why hadn't her father included her in the party this time?

Hiding her vexation, she said that Mr. Florez pretended he only understood Spanish, but a granddaughter would translate for them.

"We shan't need her. I went to evening classes in Spanish some years ago, but I've kept it up so I shall be able to understand all the old man says, and talk to him in his own language."

Melanie was always competent, thought Jennifer as she put the Russian sleigh bells back in the drawer. She felt so miserable she had difficulty in holding back the tears as she recalled the happy childhood days when dear old Mr. A. T. N. Jones used to let her listen to the musical jingle of those bells. He told her an exciting story about a little girl and her father travelling in a sleigh, and how lovely the bells sounded in the snow, and how the father fought with wolves and kept them at bay until other travellers arrived to help.

Her father, whom she adored so much and whose cherished companion she had been since her mother's death! Never before had he gone off with someone else and left her alone. She laughed when Aunt Rhoda suggested he might marry, yet how right and far-seeing Aunt Rhoda had been.

It was amazing that Jonathan should have become so friendly with Melanie Partridge on that railway journey from London to Cardiff, and Jennifer's only explanation was that Melanie had some extraordinary fascination for her father, though what this fascination was baffled her. With Stephen dead, it looked as though Melanie would one day become Mrs. Jonathan Evans. In the dusty storeroom, Jennifer faced this probable outcome of the present friendship, and she felt as though her life was collapsing in ruins.

She went back to the curator's office to type a letter to the owner of the candlesticks. She must work and work and work, but the surroundings brought back memories of Stephen and she thought sadly about the tragedy of his death. She remembered too that she had never dared to tell him about the wrongly identified seal, and that the mistake on the label still remained. This afternoon she really must alter it. She typed the letter, then made out a label HARP SEAL, found

the case key and went downstairs to substitute the new one for the old.

It was more than three months since the Pembrokeshire trip, and though Jennifer had occasionally met Gerald in the High Street, he greeted her coolly and passed on. Evidently he was still cherishing a grudge against her, while she too was annoyed at the way he had criticised her. "Saw that rest was good," that was not the reason she wanted to devote her life to her father. Oh well, Gerald could say she was like that Issachar in the Bible! She did not care.

Thinking about a certain person seldom brings him into one's company, but on this occasion it did, for Mr. Thomas came to tell her she was wanted on the telephone by Mr. Gerald Price. She answered the call and Gerald asked if he might come to talk privately with her at the museum. He added that he knew it was a good opportunity to see her alone as he had noticed Mr. Evans and Mrs. Partridge driving along the road to Bonwylla.

So would a number of other Tremynach people, thought Jennifer ruefully, and she began to wonder what rumours were already current in the town about her father and Melanie. Then she realised Gerald was asking her again if he might come to the museum now, and she pulled herself together to tell him that would be all right.

Seeing Gerald was like a glimpse of the beautiful seal bays in Pembrokeshire and she could almost feel the sea breezes on her cheeks.

Jennifer's face lit up as she came to greet him and her eyes crinkled in the way that always charmed him. She took him into the Natural History section and pointed out the new seal label.

"I'm glad you've changed that thing at last," he said. "I've been here several times, but it was still the wrong one and I began to think you weren't going to bother."

"Oh no, Gerald. It was just that I had to put off asking

Stephen to do it when he was in such a state. His nerves got awful before he . . . he . . .”

Walking upstairs to the room that was once Stephen's office, she talked about his suicide and confessed how she blamed herself for not having done more to convince Melanie that he was a mentally sick man. Gerald told her such reproaches were absurd, and the brusque way he said it made her feel better. She enquired about the book on seals, but he had not yet begun to write any of it. She rather hoped he would talk about his trip to Eire, and was disappointed when he walked round the office, looking at the outsides of files that could have no interest for him.

Actually, Gerald was worried because he had unpleasant news to give her, news he knew would distress her, but he was not the man to shirk doing something disagreeable when it had to be done.

“I came to tell you about Nebo chapel,” he explained. “You know your father approached the trustees about buying it, and they were willing to sell for a most reasonable price, but do you know he then tried to beat them down?”

“Yes, I do know that.”

And Melanie had been the one responsible, Melanie who considered herself to be the clever business woman, able to drive a hard bargain. Jennifer had disagreed with the advice and thought her father foolish to take it.

“The chapel has been sold to another customer.”

“Oh no!”

“Yes, it has.”

“But who else wanted to buy it?”

“The Corporation,” replied Gerald. “The chapel is to be pulled down and an art gallery built on the site. My dad has always been keen on Tremynach having one, and, well, he is behind the deal, but you can't blame him. It was very short-sighted of your father not to accept the Nebo trustees' offer when it was made to him.”

"I'm dreadfully sorry, Jennifer," he went on. "You must believe me when I tell you that I tried to persuade my father to hold back the negotiations, and he only went on with them after your father stuck out for this lower price."

Chapter Eleven

THE PURCHASE of Nebo by the Corporation, the proposed demolition of the building, and the erection of a municipal art gallery on the site, were proclaimed in the *Tremynach Guardian*, and due credit was given to Alderman Jenkin Price as prime mover of the scheme. He was praised as an enlightened representative of the townspeople, one who had visions in wanting Tremynach to have its own art gallery. In a press interview, he stated that he was also keen to foster the immense amount of local talent that had hitherto remained hidden because there was no place for local artists to exhibit their paintings.

Alderman Price was indeed the man of the moment. He was invited to appear in a Welsh television programme and explain his aims. The following week, he featured in another, this time speaking in the English, not Welsh, language. An interviewer asked him various questions about the situation in Tremynach and why an art gallery was needed.

These gave Alderman Price an opportunity to outline the position. Yes, an art gallery was badly needed. Although there was an excellent, privately-owned museum, there was no institution that collected pictures and where citizens could view paintings and sculpture by world famous artists.

"My goodness gracious, the alderman talks as if the Town

Council meant to outbid wealthy Americans buying up old masterpieces," was the comment of Marty's great friend, Mrs. Williams.

She had invited Marty, Rhoda, and Jennifer to her house, Arosfa, that evening to watch the television appearance of Alderman Price. She did include Jonathan and Melanie in the invitation, but knew from long association with the family that he could seldom be persuaded to come even to her house, while Melanie explained she could not leave the children alone. Jennifer did not offer to stay with them instead. She could have watched the television programme at Derwen with Jonathan but was thankful to be away from her father during the showing of this particular item. He was very bitter about losing Nebo and she dreaded witnessing a display of anger against the alderman.

At Arosfa, the atmosphere was easy and relaxed. Mrs. Williams had her two sons, their wives, and two of her grandchildren, also the Reverend J. D. Jones and his wife.

After hearing Alderman Price's ambitious plans and Mrs. Williams' comments, the minister said jokingly that it was the Welshman's privilege to add a little colour on these occasions. Were we not, as a race, always being accused of a tendency to exaggerate? Well, it was because the Welsh were a nation of poets. Dr. Gwilyn Williams told his mother she ought to take up painting or sculpture as a hobby. Ironically he suggested she started off with busts of her sons in marble.

"There's nonsensical you are, Gwilyn," said Mrs. Williams. "This art gallery is an excellent idea. Don't you agree, Rees?"

The solicitor son merely nodded. Jennifer knew he had done his best to secure Nebo for her father and would have succeeded but for Melanie's insistence on trying to make the trustees' take less. She raised the quibble over price, and then they turned to another buyer who was willing to pay what they wanted. Jennifer did not blame Alderman Price for coming in then, on behalf of Tremynach Town Council.

Mrs. J. D. Jones was busy giving her views on abstract art, of which she disapproved and of which, according to her, all sensible people disapproved. Her husband steered a middle course. He preferred pictures that, as he expressed it, looked like what they were supposed to be, but he was prepared to admit there must be merit in abstracts only he personally could not understand them.

"It's photographic I like my art to be," declared Mrs. Williams.

"Talking of photography," said the Reverend J. D. Jones. "I hear the Camera Club is going to hold an exhibition of members' work in the spring, and I expect some of Gerald Price's nature pictures will be on show. He went studying seals last autumn and I saw some first-class photographs he has taken. He tells me he intends to write a book on seals. Very interesting, I'm sure. We shall all look forward to that coming out." The minister looked at Jennifer.

Her casual reception of this information disappointed everyone, and there was an awkward pause, broken by Mrs. J. D. Jones who remarked that writing a book would not take Gerald away from his father's shop. The impression was left with the company that the interest Gerald Price was supposed to have taken in Jennifer had diminished and that she was not interested in him.

One of Mrs. Williams' daughters-in-law tactfully asked Mrs. J. D. when she expected Tal's American friends to arrive, and the minister's wife gave dates of their departure from New York, dates of arrival in London where they would be staying some time, dates of a continental tour they were making before coming to Wales, and so on.

Marty, Rhoda, and Jennifer, got back to Derwen to find that Jonathan and Melanie had also watched the television programme and, as expected, Jonathan was beside himself with anger, loudly denouncing "that Siencyn Emporium" as sly and unscrupulous. Secretly, Jennifer considered her father

to be most unfair and was thankful Rhoda kept silent, while Marty never was disposed to disagree with her brother, preferring to sustain the rôle of charming gentle elder sister. She ruled him by such methods as appeals to his sense of what was due to her, and so long as he did not again suggest moving the museum to Derwen, she did not care what happened to it, nor that the Corporation was establishing an art gallery in the town.

The blow over Nebo^{*} was made worse by the increased popularity of the alderman, and Jonathan became more resentful and jealous than ever before. He longed to be acclaimed as one who served his native place faithfully. He had a deep, dedicated love for Tremynach. He would like to have been elected to the Town Council. He would like to have become a magistrate. He would like to have been a popular figure, not just "Mr. Jonathan Evans who wrote the history of Tremynach."

That was his label, and it left Jonathan feeling baulked and frustrated. He knew the general opinion of his work was that it was clever and learned and useful to those interested in "that sort of thing." But he was aware that only a small minority, mostly students, read the book. Tremynach's past made a fascinating story, but Jonathan failed to present it in a stimulating fashion, while his style was so laboured that the whole effect was dull and ponderous. No one was more conscious than him of failure to achieve the desired effect, but he was hoping the second book, the history of the ironworks, would be different. That was shaping well at last. He knew he was writing as he used to write when Vera was alive, and sometimes he forgot it was not her, but Melanie Partridge who sat assisting him.

If only the Tremynach public liked him better! Jonathan took it for granted that his lack of popularity locally was due to his Tomlinson ancestors, for there remained a legacy of bitterness against the former ironmasters. There were memories

of wrongs done by these men in the previous century, while the benefits they had brought to Tremynach were forgotten. What Jonathan did not realise though was that his unpopularity was his own fault, and arose from the arrogant aloofness about him, a lack of human warmth that repelled most people.

After finishing his denunciation of "that Siencyn Emporium" to his daughter and sisters, when they returned after spending the evening at Arosfa, Jonathan sank back in the armchair looking completely exhausted. Jennifer longed to put her arms round him, to kiss and comfort him, but this was something she dared not do. He had never encouraged physical demonstrations of affection from her.

She was very concerned about him. The loss of Nebo had hit him hard. Now he would have to try again to find some building suitable for conversion into a museum. She wondered if he had any definite plans, but if he had they were not likely to be discussed with her, only Melanie. Jennifer was struggling hard these days not to resent Melanie's growing influence over Jonathan. If marriage to Melanie brought him happiness, then his daughter must be pleased about it. Jennifer told herself this over and over again, and said the same thing aloud to her aunts, for Marty now admitted the probability of such an event and constantly lamented about it in private, before Jennifer and Rhoda.

When it was mentioned to Dilys, she displayed a decided pro-Melanie attitude, and seemed to think Jonathan's second marriage anything but the catastrophe it was in Marty's eyes.

"Melanie will be marvellous for Daddy. I hope they soon settle things."

She turned to Jennifer. "Of course, it's going to be hard on you." She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm sorry."

The last phrase ought to have been uttered with far more feeling to carry conviction, but there was a kind of "you've had your day" implication, and Jennifer realised that envy, previously submerged, had come to the surface. Dilys was so

conscious of the indignity of her own illegitimate birth that it was only natural she should be glad to witness the eclipse of her more fortunate half-sister.

"You'll just have to accept fate, Aunt Marty," said Dilys smugly.

Marty tossed her head but made no reply. After Dilys' departure, she declared that she was disgusted and disappointed.

"But what can you expect from Dilys! She is not one of us."

Rhoda turned on her sister for referring to Dilys' birth.

"That shouldn't be brought up against her."

"I did not say it to her face."

"There's no need for you to say it behind her back, either."

"I wonder when Jonathan will propose to that hussy."

That would not be for some time, was Rhoda's opinion. Jonathan was too occupied with his new book to spare a thought for matrimony until he had finished it.

"Not that Melanie is letting the grass grow under her feet while he is busy. Look at the way she makes herself indispensable to him by helping with the ruddy work, looking up references and typing and all the rest! My God, she doesn't miss a single trick! And then she has no time to bother with her kids and expects us to mind them."

The pronoun us meant Rhoda and Jennifer, for Marty, though sweet and indulgent to the children, did not put herself out for them. Johnny ought to have started school at the beginning of the New Year, but he refused to go without Unity, who was not old enough until Easter. Then came a further delay because Unity had bronchitis. By this time, Jennifer had got used to taking two or three afternoons off each week from the museum to relieve Rhoda of some of the burden. She regarded this as only temporary, until Johnny and Unity went to school, but the first day she found she would have to leave work early to collect them.

The long-awaited American visitors of the J. D. Joneses had arrived the previous evening and were asked to tea at Derwen the next day. Marty was as eager as the minister and his wife to show off the Drysgoed ironmasters' residence, while Rhoda wanted to display her poodles to Mrs. Frazier, hoping to sell one to her. As there were no puppies now, Rhoda concentrated on grooming Mimi, Sparkle, and Bambi to look their best.

Mrs. Frazier turned out to be a short, stout woman, jolly-looking, with curly auburn hair. She wore glasses and, like her husband, smoked incessantly. She talked volubly about the tour of Europe they had made before coming to Wales and, though it was of short duration, she and her husband appeared to have visited every city of note. Professor Frazier summed up their activities with the concise statement, "I reckon we hit the high spots."

Not having yet been in Tremynach for twenty-four hours, their impressions were scanty, but their host had taken them for a walk round the town that morning, enjoyable but trying on the feet to two people who were accustomed to car riding, not walking. Mrs. Frazier was worn out when seeing the Doge's Palace in Venice, called by her the Dog's Palace, and she found Tremynach High Street, Bonwylyfa and Drysgoed ruined ironworks, and the Reverend J. D. Jones' chapel, equally exhausting. She complained that her shoes felt too tight and her ankles were swollen. Marty silently admired the American woman's smart footwear.

But the Fraziers were genuinely interested in Tremynach and looked forward to meeting the local historian. To them Wales was a strange, unknown country, rich in old buildings and with inhabitants who clung to peculiar customs, such as tall black hats for women. Dot was disappointed at not meeting anyone in Tremynach wearing the costume of bygone days.

However, she had witnessed one expected sight.

"Wal, when Tal talked about the sheep coming into the garden and eating the flowers, I couldn't figure what he meant. Sheep with us are five hundred miles away. Then I saw them in a front garden where somebody had left the gate open."

Jennifer arrived with the two children and Dot Frazier went into raptures over them. Her own daughter, Birdie, had a little boy the same age as Johnny and was called "Ay-dee", which turned out to be her pronunciation of Eddie.

Johnny was overcome by so much attention and was too shy to say much about school, but Rhoda managed to extract from him that he liked his first day there and had been painting. "A picture of Jesus," he said, "and I showed him going away with a suitcase and I put big letters 'J.C. on it.'"

"Isn't he cute!" cooed Dot.

Unity was already sidling up to Professor Frazier. She stated her impressions without any prompting.

"We takes off our coats, and we works, and we talks, and we has our dinner, and we sleeps, and we plays, and we puts on our coats, and we comes home."

"You're a grand little maid," said the professor.

On this special occasion, tea was served in the drawing-room, and Dot gazed admiringly at the Victorian decor, at the striped apple-green and white wallpaper with baskets of roses on a white frieze, the now faded and dingy green satin upholstery on sofa and chairs, the lace curtains slightly tinged with yellow, the gilt-framed sentimental pictures, the ornaments, knick-knacks and what-not, and the large crystal glass chandelier.

"Wal, I figure a drawing-room in Buckingham Palace must be just like this," gasped Dot. "What wouldn't I give to have that davenport! And those lace drapes are like what my grandmamma had in her house. I used to go there as a little girl. It's sure a real period room."

Johnny was eyeing the tea trolley and forgot his shyness to

say loudly, "My favourite name is Jesus and my favourite food is chocolate sponge."

Mrs. J. D. Jones was horrified by this mixture of sacred and profane, but her reproof was lost amid Dot Frazier's continued raptures. Dot had plumped herself on the sofa, that she called a davenport, and was admiring a mirror in china frame that was decorated with gaudy blue and pink cupids. Dilys always called it "the love horror".

When tea was over, Marty took the visitors on a complete tour of the house, and would have included the garden as well, but Dot said her feet were killing her and she must sit down. They settled in the morning-room where Mimi, Sparkle, and Bambi were produced for inspection. Dot loved all three, must buy one to take back for "Ay-dee", but found it impossible to make up her mind which to choose. The discussion went on and on till Marty reminded Rhoda that Jonathan would soon be home. It was an understood thing that the poodles were banished to the kitchen regions or garden then, because of Jonathan's dislike of dogs. Dot said she would decide which poodle to have later. There was no hurry because she and Hamilton would be staying till "the fall" with Jesse and Sian. Marty gasped at what seemed to her an unduly familiar use of the host and hostess's Christian names.

"We're not burdening these sweet folk with us all the vacation," explained Dot. "Hamilton and I mean to make a tour of the north of England and Scotland and Ireland in the car he's bought me, and maybe we'll hop over to Scandinavia as well."

Rhoda asked about the new car of British make and Dot was delighted with its performance, especially the fact that it used so little "gas" in comparison with the big, powerful one she ran at home.

"Gee, it's a marvel. It goes on and on and I'm real scared I shall forget to go to the gas station and then find I'm stuck."

"Here's my brother at last," said Marty. "He and Mrs.

Partridge—the children's mother—yes, I can hear them in the hall. Johnny, run and welcome Mummy, and you too Unity!"

Marty performed the introductions with a grand Tomlinson air inherited from her mother. Good manners, that were a part of Jonathan's creed, made him greet the guests with courtesy, but the strain of behaving politely, combined with an ill-concealed impatience to be rid of them, made him appear even more stiff and forbidding than usual. Professor Frazier told his wife later that Mr. Evans was so stuck up he might be a genuine lord or "dook". The Reverend J. D. Jones knew his old friend well enough to realise that Jonathan was agitated about something, and as soon as he could he took his wife and visitors home.

It was then time for baths, bedtime story, and settling down of the children before the grown-ups had their evening meal, but for once Melanie declined help in putting Johnny and Unity to bed.

"No, don't go, Jennifer," said Jonathan. "Melanie will manage alone tonight. There is something I want to tell you and your aunts before supper."

This must be the announcement of his engagement to Melanie, decided Jennifer, and now it was imminent, she felt almost sick with grief and sense of loss, in spite of wishes for her father's happiness, but as he spoke she soon learnt that was not his present news.

As though issuing a royal command, Jonathan stated that he had decided to move the Tomlinson Memorial Museum to Derwen. Only part was to come as yet, for the reserve stock and certain other sections would be left in Tomlinson Street until the old building was actually about to be demolished. He had plans for certain structural alterations to be made at Derwen and work would start next week.

"This is my final word on the matter, Marty. I refuse to discuss anything further."

He did not say "our", but Marty was well aware that Melanie Partridge was behind this, and that she had persuaded Jonathan to keep the scheme a secret until the last minute. He had done this deliberately, knowing how opposed his favourite sister was to such a change in her old home. There was no trace of regret at the distress he was causing her, neither in expression nor voice. He spoke mechanically, giving the effect of a sound recording, but that of a different person speaking, someone unknown, not Jonathan Evans.

"Naturally I wish you both to continue living here, that is if you so desire." He took Jennifer's acquiescence for granted and only addressed his sisters. "The nursery wing will provide us with living-room, dining-room, and kitchen. Fortunately, the bathroom and attic stairs are adjacent to that wing, so I am putting a door across the landing and this will keep our private part separate from the museum. Our bedrooms will be on the very top floor—you, Rhoda, Jennifer, myself, and of course Melanie. She is dividing the big front attic into three with partitions so that Johnny and Unity can each have a bedroom."

Jonathan paused and the storm broke.

"There will be no need to make three rooms out of the big front attic, Jonathan. You will have an extra room at your disposal, so a division into two will suffice."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean when you are planning accommodation you can include the former servant's bedroom that you propose to allot to me. I may only be a poor aged widow, but nothing on earth will induce me to countenance the desecration of our beautiful home by staying here under such—well, after such vandalism."

"You are talking very foolishly, Marty."

But Marty went remorselessly on.

"I shall speak to Alderman Price tomorrow about finding me a refuge in Preswylfa. You may call him your enemy but

he is not mine, and I am sure he will sympathise with my trials. Fancy a descendant of the Tomlinsons of Derwen being forced to end her days in a Corporation home!"

Marty burst into tears, but Jonathan remained unmoved and impassive. It horrified Jennifer to see her father so unyielding. In the past he had always given way to Marty, and it was terrible that now he could be absolutely indifferent to her wishes.

"Daddy has altered." Jennifer blamed this on Melanie.

Marty drew herself up with what she considered Tomlinson dignity. In spite of being in her seventies, she looked regal and beautiful, like a defeated monarch facing a triumphant foe. She was ready to sweep out of the room, but before making a spectacular exit she had to utter her epilogue.

"You have given this ultimatum, Jonathan, and you say your decision is final."

"Final and irrevocable," he declared, glaring at her.

"Very well, I warn you now that I shall never forgive you. As for the Tomlinson Memorial Museum, I know, and you know, that our grandfather would have preferred it to be given to the Tremynach Corporation rather than have Derwen ruined because of it. Wrecking our family home to accommodate a lot of local bygoness, and stuffed animals, and what-have-you! Jonathan Tomlinson Evans, I disown you as a brother, and I shall have nothing more to do with you as long as I live."

Chapter Twelve

PRESWYLFA, THE home for old ladies, was the last place where Marty intended to end her days. She only threatened to go there because she hoped Jonathan would feel it a disgrace and straightway capitulate, imploring her to remain at Derwen. In her heart, Marty believed her old sway over him strong. After the dramatic declaration that she would never forgive him if he went on with his scheme of installing the museum in the old home, she expected him to have second thoughts and soon promise her he would not do this terrible thing.

She insisted on all meals being brought to her bedroom, for though Rhoda and Jennifer might continue to eat with such a perfidious brother and father, she could not. But the following morning all hope of Jonathan recanting was crushed. Rhoda came upstairs to tell Marty that Jonathan, accompanied by Melanie, was showing the local auctioneer round and they were deciding on what furniture was to be sold.

"Sold!" screamed Marty.

"There has to be space for these damned museum exhibits. Looks as though most of the stuff we don't use every day will go."

"Not the furniture in the drawing-room and dining-room and library? Oh no, Rhoda! Most of that goes back to Noah

Tomlinson's time. It has been in our family for years and years. What would dear Mama say if she knew!"

"Yes, it's enough to make Mother turn in her grave, but the museum is more important to Jonathan than Derwen furniture. Anyway, it's that Melanie who is deciding what should go. Jonathan is clay in her hands. I suppose the stuff will fetch a good bit."

"Whatever money Jonathan gets from the furniture, he will use it all for the museum. We shan't benefit."

"Mother's bloody will! I've never grumbled about Jonathan inheriting the lot because I've assumed Jennifer would have it eventually, but the poor kid won't have a brass farthing now. As soon as Jonathan marries that Melanie, he'll make a will in favour of her, and maybe Johnny, but nobody else will get a smell of the Tomlinson money. Although it's been reduced with ruddy taxation and values changing, it's damnable that what is left of old Noah's fortune should leave the family. His descendants ought to benefit, not some designing chit of a widow."

Marty gave up any hope of reconciliation with her brother after this. She must leave Derwen, but where could she go? Mrs. Williams offered a spare bedroom while she looked round. Marty was not willing to take this since her friend only had the one, and a cousin was shortly coming to stay. Mrs. J. D. Jones had the Fraziers and was also expecting her daughter from London later on. Dilys, though saying privately to Jennifer that she and David thought Marty a silly fool, asked her to stay at Rosebank for a time, but Marty refused. She disliked all the activity that went on there.

"That eternal carpentry of David's would drive me to distraction."

"You could help Dilys with her cleaning and her jamming and her bottling."

Marty shuddered. "And dust the ivy round the porch, I suppose. No thank you."

This was an old joke between Marty, Rhoda, and Jennifer, since Rhoda called during a dry spell and found Dilys with a cloth wiping dust off the ivy leaves growing round her porch.

"I think I shall write to Miriam and suggest she sells her house in Torquay and that we buy one in Tremynach between us."

Miriam was Marty's sister-in-law and the two had never got on well together. It seemed unlikely that Miss Davies would consent to leave Torquay, where she had been living for twenty years, and agree to a joint establishment, one doomed to failure from the start. However Marty insisted on writing to make this futile proposal.

"It won't be any use, Auntie."

"I must do something," said Marty. "If only poor Ernest were alive, your father would not dare to treat me so shabbily."

"You shouldn't blame Daddy too much."

"Oh, I know that designing hussy is at the bottom of everything, but, Jennifer darling, I still cannot excuse Jonathan for being so completely under her thumb. I am afraid he is a very weak man. I always thought he had a strong character, like the Tomlinsons, but I can see now I was mistaken."

Miriam Davies sent back a curt letter refusing to consider her sister-in-law's proposal. Then Marty had a stroke of luck that solved her problem for the immediate future. The upper flat at Arosfa was let to a factory executive and, quite unexpectedly, the firm decided to send Mr. Bates to Canada in connection with the development of a new product. He was to go at once and would be there for several months. Expenses were being paid for him to take his wife as well.

The couple wanted to sublet the flat during their absence and approached the owner, Mrs. Williams, who thought straightway of her dear friend, Mrs. Davies Derwen.

"Good gracious me, if that isn't the hand of providence," she told herself, picking up the phone.

Marty was delighted with the offer, which gave her

accommodation for the time being and enabled her to leave Derwen immediately. She was not a person to worry unduly about the future, and now this good fortune had come to her, she felt confident something else would turn up when she again needed it.

Jennifer helped her aunt to pack clothes and personal possessions. In practice this meant that Jennifer did the work while Marty stood by, folding a scarf or fingering a piece of jewellery and lamenting the ruination of her beloved home through "that abominable little adventuress." As for Jonathan! Marty was ready to accuse him of so wanting to spite her that he might even throw the Egyptian donation from "dear Clive", her husband's relation, on a rubbish heap.

"Of course the Lucas gift, like everything else in the museum, will be taken care of, Auntie," said Jennifer, inwardly recalling how Stephen hated the mummies, his mad impulse to banish them to a storeroom, and the subsequent row with her father which culminated in Stephen's tragic suicide.

Already poor Stephen seemed completely forgotten by Melanie, who, Jennifer felt certain, was in love with Jonathan. She wondered what she should do when Melanie and her father got married. Aunt Marty had left Derwen, soon Aunt Rhoda would be going, and she hated the thought of living there under such different conditions.

Rhoda was as determined as Marty to leave the old home, but, having a more calculating and less impetuous disposition, she planned only to go when it suited her, and the first step towards departure was selling the three pedigree poodles. Before actually meeting Dot Frazier, she marked her down as a likely customer for one of them, and was heartened by the American woman's interest on the first afternoon of their acquaintance. Dot kept putting off a decision about choosing Mimi or Sparkle or Bambi, and meanwhile, she and Rhoda were becoming great friends.

Through Rhoda, the Fraziers were able to purchase various

Victoriana they coveted from the Derwen drawing-room, including what-not and mirror decorated with cupids. Rhoda approached Jonathan and before Melanie had time to raise objections she contrived to make him ring the Reverend J. D. Jones saying the Fraziers might come and pick out the things they wanted before any furniture and ornaments were sent to a saleroom. The Professor and his wife were grateful to Rhoda for this, and soon Dot and Rhoda had become very attached to each other. Rhoda was invited to go on the tour of northern England, Scotland and Ireland, which was to finish up with West and North Wales. Then came Dot's decision to buy all three poodles, not just one. But the most astonishing outcome of this friendship was Rhoda's decision to go to the United States when the Fraziers returned and to spend a vacation there as their guest.

"And I am going," Rhoda told Jennifer. "I've never touched the money I got from Ted's insurance, so I shall blue that and have a good old fling, even if it is my last. Of course, I may come across some lonely divorced or widowed American who will take me on as his wife, but if I don't have that good luck I can still come back to Britain and look for a job. Something will turn up." She and Marty were alike in having an optimistic faith in the future.

Professor Frazier was a keen amateur photographer and took, what seemed to Jennifer, a vast quantity of movies and stills of Tremynach and the country round. Rhoda was continually going with him and Dot in the car in pursuit of the quaint and the unusual for his pictorial record. It disappointed him and Dot that Welsh people no longer wore the national costume in everyday life, and, so that he could show this to Birdie and Eddie "who would be sure thrilled", Rhoda dressed up and posed for him against the background of an old cottage. Mrs. J. D. Jones borrowed the dress, and hat which she got through Gerald Price. Gerald met them at the cottage. He brought along the costume and Rhoda went inside to

change. He was apparently well known to the Fraziers by now, and the Professor praised his work on show at the local photographic exhibition. Jennifer had been several times to look at Gerald's pictures of seals. Some she recognised as taken in Pembrokeshire and the rest were the Irish ones. Meeting Gerald now, Jennifer had to tell him how much she liked them.

Jennifer's smile swept away the guilt and embarrassment Gerald felt since his father purchased Nebo on behalf of the Corporation. True Jennifer had not blamed the alderman when Gerald broke the news to her the day he came to the museum, yet he feared she resented the death blow to Jonathan Evans' scheme for using Nebo. It was common talk in the town that Mr. Evans Local Historian wanted the old chapel for the Tomlinson Memorial Museum and was "hopping mad" at Alderman Price beating him to it. The anger of Jennifer's father and the triumphant publicity of his own kept Gerald from making contact with Jennifer since then.

They talked while Rhoda posed, Dot gave instructions, and Hamilton Frazier got his shots. Gerald confessed he had not yet started to write his book on seals when Jennifer asked about it. He had a great deal of material to collect and thought he would not begin the actual writing until he had all the data he wanted.

Jennifer felt as if she were experiencing a pleasant dream as he talked. It was lovely to meet Gerald again. She had hoped again and again to see him somewhere in Tremynach during the past months, but fate had not been kind, and now his very presence dispelled the painful deserted feeling she had through her father's indifference and the loss of the old intimate comradeship between them. Before she came down to earth properly, she found herself saying yes to an invitation from Gerald. He wanted her to go with him to Brecon the following afternoon. They would call at Lew's farm and have tea.

Thursday was half-day closing for Tremynach shops, and an outing with Gerald became the regular thing. She ceased to go to the museum on Thursdays at all and, immediately after lunch, she went to an appointed spot where Gerald picked her up in his car. Only Marty and Rhoda were told about this. Jennifer needed Rhoda's help, for someone had to collect the children from school and usually Jennifer left the museum early to do this. Rhoda told Marty and Marty was delighted, expressing her joy in effusive fashion.

"If I can but see darling Jennifer married to dear Gerald Price, I shall be able with all my heart to sing the Nunc Dimittis."

Gerald did not make love to Jennifer on these outings. He was shocked at her loss of gaiety when he met her after a lapse of months and he hated Jonathan Evans, not only for having unconsciously come between them years ago, but for having hurt Jennifer so deeply now.

Many men would have rushed to snatch a hurried advantage from the changed situation between Jennifer and her father, but though Gerald loved her intensely he was wary of the hazards of precipitous action. One should not press one's foot on the car accelerator until one had a clear road. He did not want Jennifer turning to him just because she was lonely. He wanted a wife who would give him a truly mature love in response to his love for her. Once he despaired of Jennifer's emancipation from her father's domination, but now the adoring daughter was supplanted by Melanie Partridge, Gerald waited for her complete escape from what he regarded as a shameful thralldom of spirit. At last he believed his Ariel would shortly be freed from the spell imprisoning her in a cloven pine.

The regular Thursday afternoon meetings continued and Jennifer's aunts made every effort to stop circulation of gossip about their niece and Gerald, dreading Jonathan's interference if he heard about the friendship. He might be wrapped

up in Melanie and generally indifferent to his once-adored daughter, but he would be roused to a hundred per cent fury at the prospect of her marrying the hated alderman's son. Even Marty feared Jennifer might be swayed by Jonathan's objections, so told her friends that the couple must become engaged and their wedding day fixed before a whisper of the romance reached her brother's ears.

The same caution applied in Melanie's case. Like Jonathan, she was too absorbed in other matters to care what Jennifer did, but of course she would pass on rumours to him. Fortunately, she had little to do with local people, for she had not made any friends in Tremynach and her contact with the museum caretaker and the Derwen daily helps was kept to a minimum. No one really was likely to gossip to Melanie.

As for Jonathan, he was becoming more and more withdrawn into himself. Apparently he was too preoccupied with the great museum move to care about anything else. His sisters and Jennifer concluded this was why he had not yet proposed to Melanie, and that an engagement would follow the opening. Jonathan never had been interested in other people's doings, not even those of his beloved daughter unless it were something in conjunction with himself, or connected with his local history hobby, but now Jennifer might not have existed. At breakfast, he gave her and Rhoda a mechanical good morning, asked Melanie about the day's plans, ignored Unity, fussed a little over Johnny, and then lapsed into silence for the rest of the meal, unless roused by some remark from Melanie or a question from Johnny.

Dilys might have got to hear about her sister and Gerald if she were making her usual frequent visits to Derwen, but David Morgan had hurt his back when he slipped and fell off a ladder. Why must he mess with the garage roof instead of employing a proper builder to repair it? Such was Marty's comment on the accident. With David in hospital, Dilys was too busy to come to Tremynach. She visited him every day.

taking fruit and flowers from Rosebank garden, and she made him savouries and tarts and cakes to vary the monotony of hospital diet, while she expected family and friends to rally round his bedside. Jennifer and her aunts had been to Cardiff twice to visit him, afterwards spending the evening at Rosebank with Dilys, but neither Jonathan nor Melanie had as yet paid a duty call on the sick man.

Work on the book about Tremynach's old ironworks was suspended while Jonathan and Melanie were occupied with the conversion of Derwen and moving of exhibits from Tomlinson Street. Melanie was planner-in-chief. She decided the Tremynach bygones should occupy the three big reception rooms, and she would have liked to have the dividing wall between library and dining-room knocked down to make one large exhibition gallery, but Jonathan demurred on account of additional expense.

The morning-room and gun-room were to be offices, while the Welsh and ceramic collections were to occupy all available upstairs rooms. Antiquities, natural history, and reserve stock, were to remain in the Tomlinson Street building for some time. Before it became necessary to move them, Jonathan vaguely hoped to have been able to make extra galleries out of coach house and stables, though he had no idea where money was to be found for these extra conversions.

Melanie wanted a grand opening ceremony, graced by some notable person, and her wishes overcame Jonathan's dislike of public functions. He even agreed to overlook the past behaviour of Lord Meadows and invite him to perform the opening. Melanie thought that the wealthy peer would be so flattered by this honour that he would give a substantial donation to museum funds, and she was as disappointed as Jonathan was angry when Lord Meadows sent a curt refusal. He had promised to undertake a similar engagement in Tremynach late in the autumn, so could not possibly accept this one for July. The previous commitment turned out to be the laying of the

art gallery's foundation stone, and Jonathan's rage was intense when he discovered he had again been forestalled by Alderman Price.

It made Jennifer writhe to listen to her father's denunciations of the alderman, all of which she knew were unjust. She worried about Jonathan. He looked so tired and seemed to have aged. She would be glad when this museum move was over, even though the aftermath would be his engagement to Melanie.

Poor darling Daddy, she thought. I do hope Melanie makes him happy.

Rhoda went away at the beginning of June with the Fraziers on their tour, and the evening after her aunt's departure Jennifer sat in the morning-room trying to amuse Johnny and Unity who were cross because Melanie would not allow them to put on the television.

"It will soon be your bedtime."

"Can't we have television before we go to bed?"

"No, Mr. Evans and I have got a lot of work to do and we must start now. I hope you are going to be as quiet as mice and not disturb us."

It was most unusual for the two children to be naughty and quarrelsome, but they were on this occasion, and when Melanie lectured them for being noisy, Johnny began to cry. Jonathan offered to play tiddleywinks with Johnny, but Melanie said she needed his help in drafting the letter to Sir Philip Jones. He was a wealthy antiquarian who lived in mid-Wales. Jennifer wondered why Melanie was writing to him until it dawned upon her that he must be the second choice for opening of the museum.

Jennifer put down her book and exerted herself to relate the story of Sinbad the Sailor, but she was not as successful in holding the children's attention as Scheherazade had been with the sultan. Unity wanted a tale about a prince who fell in love with a princess, but Johnny said princesses were silly and he

wanted a story about a prince killing lots of people. Jennifer switched to Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, hoping Unity would identify herself with Morgiana and that the pouring of boiling oil on the robbers would satisfy Johnny. But they were still peevish. They would not listen properly. They whined and grizzled. Never before had they been tiresome like this.

Their behaviour was explained 'next morning when they were found to have developed spots. The doctor was sent for and he diagnosed chicken-pox.

As the daily helps were afraid of contact with infection, however slight, in case they took home germs to their own children, Melanie had to keep Johnny and Unity in bed, isolated from Mrs. Jenkins, Mrs. Sibley, and Mrs. Bandler. Jennifer was willing to help with the nursing and minding, but she also had care of the poodles during Rhoda's absence and considered it an imposition that Melanie should expect her to take complete charge of the sickroom.

"I can't be late for the museum today. I mean, I've got simply stacks of things to do. There's this important letter that must go to Sir Philip immediately because I want his reply this week so as to start getting programmes and invitations printed. They're all ready except for the name of the big noise, and of course I was relying on that horrible Lord Meadows. I did not think he would let us down like this. Of course he could have come to the two functions. He just seized on the art gallery stone-laying as an excuse."

Jennifer spent a trying day with two fretful scratchy children. Melanie only took over for a short time in the evening before they went to sleep. The same thing happened the following day, which was Wednesday. Determined to have her usual outing on Thursday afternoon and not be obliged to put off Gerald, Jennifer told Melanie firmly that she must catch a certain bus to Brecon because she had promised to visit friends there.

"Oh well, if you've got something fixed, I suppose I'll have

to stop at home, but it is frightfully awkward for me to be away from the museum, even for a few hours. I mean, I've got masses to do. You don't realise what all this means."

The implication was that Jennifer was extremely selfish, but she made no reply. She did not care what Melanie thought. The children could not be alone this particular day, but next week she hoped to leave them in charge of the daily helps while she went with Gerald.

Jonathan and Melanie drove off to the museum after breakfast. Half an hour later, Jennifer was called to the phone. It was Melanie.

"We shan't be back to lunch, Jennifer, and I'm so sorry but you'll have to tell these Brecon friends of yours you can't go this afternoon. Mr. Evans and I are having lunch with Sir Philip Jones at some place near Aberystwyth. I can't pronounce your Welsh names, but it is a long one beginning with Llan, and that's where he lives. There was a reply to my—I mean, Mr. Evans' letter, that was sent off on Tuesday. It was waiting at the museum when we got here this morning. He has invited us to lunch."

"But why must you both go—and today of all days?"

"We've got to see him at once about the museum opening. We want him to do it."

"Can't you arrange details by post?"

"We haven't got to that state. I only asked for an appointment when I wrote. He probably thinks Mr. Evans wants to consult him on some local history matter. I thought it was better not to explain, but to see him and then make our request. I mean, he's not so likely to be snooty and refuse if we ask him in person. Yes, Mr. Evans, I'm coming. Your father is waiting, Jennifer, so I must fly or we'll never get to this place in time for lunch. Awfully sorry, and all that! Expect us home about six. Jonathan—I mean Mr. Evans—thinks we might stop at Builth Wells and have tea. Cheerio!"

Jennifer was desperate. She would even have rung up Dilys

and implored her to come as substitute nurse, but she knew that was hopeless because David was still in hospital, undergoing treatment for a strained back, and Dilys was fully occupied with visiting him and with doing the work of two in the garden. Jennifer had not been able to get to Cardiff this week, but she phoned Dilys to explain how she was tied and she ordered a basket of fruit and some flowers to be sent to David from a Cardiff store. His wife was taking him plenty of produce and floral offerings from the Rosebank garden, so these gifts were unnecessary, but Jennifer knew any tokens of sympathy pleased Dilys.

No, there was nobody she could ask to stay with Johnny and Unity. Aunt Marty had sworn never to set foot inside Derwen again. Besides, she was quite incapable of coping with children.

Slowly and reluctantly Jennifer dialled the Emporium number and asked to speak to Mr. Gerald Price.

"Gerald, I'm afraid I've got to break our date for this afternoon. My father and Melanie have had to go to mid-Wales on urgent business, and I'm the only person here to mind Johnny and Unity. They've got chicken-pox and our helps are afraid of the infection."

"Doesn't the infection matter in your case?"

"Oh, you know chicken-pox is nothing! Only our helps have little children of their own and they think they might carry germs to them. Melanie was going to stay with Johnny and Unity. I'd arranged that with her. But this unexpected business cropped up and, well, I'm landed! Oh, Gerald, I'm terribly, terribly sorry!"

She stood it for granted he would understand her predicament so was quite unprepared for his anger, yes, such anger as she had never before experienced from Gerald. He had always been bitter about her "daddy-complex". He had lectured her on her immature outlook. He had reproached her for revelling in what he called a cosy existence. But she did not think he had

such a temper as she now witnessed. They were not face to face, only holding communication over the telephone, but lack of visual contact did not lessen the force of his anger.

"You've always put me second to your father. I thought you had changed, but here you are, breaking a definite engagement with me and spoiling my afternoon, just because Mr. Evans won't leave Mrs. Partridge to look after her own sick kids. That's typical of you—to put me off because of Daddy! It's always Daddy and what Daddy wants! Well, I'm not standing for it any more."

"Gerald, do please be reasonable."

"I am not reasonable and I have no intention of being reasonable."

"But can't you see, I've got two sick children on my hands!"

"That's your own fault for being such a doormat. Why didn't you tell your father that you weren't going to mind them? Mrs. Partridge would have to do it then. They're her responsibility, not yours."

"My father doesn't come into this."

"Of course he does! I've told you over and over again that you've got a slave mentality where Mr. Evans is concerned. You'll never be any different. I've just been kidding myself, thinking you might. Oh, you make me tired!"

Gerald must have replaced the receiver. Jennifer went on pleading with him to be reasonable but the line was dead. She put back her receiver. She was not going to ring him again. She had that much pride.

That he of all people should be so unfair! Fancy Gerald complaining like a child that she was spoiling his afternoon! But then Jennifer had never realised what suffering she caused him through her single-minded devotion to her father. If she had, she would have understood how today seemed to him like the last straw.

Chapter Thirteen

"DOCTOR WILLIAMS says our chicken-pox will go on Tuesday. When can we go back to school?" demanded Johnny.

Jennifer had not heard anything from Gerald since he abruptly ended their telephone conversation ten days ago. She resented his unfairness and selfishness, she told herself, and that Thursday night she worked up her anger to fever-pitch, but by the next morning she was already hoping for him to get in touch with her and apologise for his rudeness. She had come to depend on Gerald recently. Those outings with him helped her to throw off the humiliation of being unwanted by Jonathan. She forgot her father and Melanic when she was with Gerald. There was complete accord as they walked and talked together, and with him her old assurance and gaiety returned.

Mechanically she played games with Johnny and Unity, or read stories to them, but her mind was absorbed in recalling little incidents during those Thursday meetings and her ear was alert for the sound of the telephone bell.

Friday passed. Then came Saturday. By this time, Jennifer was going through a private hell. She began to see that by putting Gerald in a subordinate position to her father she had made him madly jealous of Jonathan's hold over her. Of course he rejoiced at this prospect of a second marriage. She knew he had fallen in love with her again. Perhaps that love had

never ceased with him. Wanting her for his wife, he naturally lost his temper at the slightest indication that she might be pushing him into the background even though she was merely breaking her promise to go out with him on a certain afternoon because home ties interfered.

I never bothered about the hurt to him, she thought, her mind straying back to university days and, then again, to her second refusal at Pwllgwaun Farm.

Jennifer had not realised before that she was being cruel. It did not occur to her that his love was so deep, nor so lasting. Like the majestic glittering icebergs Gerald saw in the Arctic, much of his feeling was submerged and hidden. Now perception flashed over her, bringing remorse for her previous blindness. She knew now she really loved Gerald, that she wanted him for her mate and that he mattered more than her father or anyone else. Naturally she still loved Jonathan, but that was a different kind of affection and she gasped with exasperation when she thought of her crass stupidity in the past. How could she delude herself with the belief that a life of daughterly devotion could suffice when there was a man like Gerald wanting her for his wife?

Jennifer began to long desperately for a chance to show him that at last she was prepared to give him the kind of love he demanded, but there was no phone call, no message, and pride kept her from ringing him. She was sure he would soon make a move towards a reconciliation.

The children had almost recovered and, as no daily help came on Sunday, they were allowed to run about the house. Johnny made his statement about the chicken-pox ending when they were having breakfast.

"Do we go back to school on Tuesday?"

Jonathan heard the remark and replied not this term. Even Melanie protested against such an absurd decision but Jonathan kept insisting the little boy looked pale and needed a holiday by the sea. He passed over Unity as usual.

Melanie said she was far too busy to take the children for a holiday. With the museum opening less than three weeks off, she had not a moment to spare. The visit to Sir Philip Jones had failed in its purpose. He could not undertake any such engagement as he was going away immediately and would not be returning to Wales until the autumn. After this second rebuff, Jonathan wanted to dispense with a formal opening, but Melanie persisted in trying again. She had the tenacity of a dog who refuses to relinquish a particularly juicy bone. Her third suggestion was Professor Frazier, and, so determined was she to clinch the matter before Jonathan raised more objections to the function, that she put through a call to the hotel where he and Dot and Rhoda were staying in Killarney. The American was flattered at being asked to undertake a ceremony that a lord and a knight had been approached to perform. He did not mind being second—or rather third—fiddle. All he thought about was the impression this sign of his importance among new friends would make on his old ones at home.

He told Melanie over the phone that he was delighted to accept.

"Yes, Mrs. Partridge, I'll be mighty glad to do this museum opening for you. Yes, we'll be back in Tremynach then. Dot and I sure fixed our trip so that we wouldn't miss the great day, and now Hamilton Frazier is to be the star performer you can be sure he won't let you down."

Melanie continued to tell Jonathan at breakfast that Sunday morning why she could not possibly take Johnny and Unity away until after the first week in July.

"Supposing we all go then, Mr. Evans. You will feel like a change, and I know Jennifer will look after the museum while we're away. Won't you, Jennifer?"

"It is very important that Johnny should have a seaside holiday at once, after this illness. I insist on him going now, not waiting at least three weeks."

An idea came to Jennifer, a plan that would provide her with a face-saving excuse to get in touch with Gerald.

"Well, if you think that, Mr. Evans, I expect Jennifer can take them somewhere this week. I mean, she isn't busy like me."

For once, Melanie was playing into her hands, thought Jennifer. And when Melanie bumbled about the Gower peninsula or Tenby, Jennifer quickly suggested the west coast of Wales.

"I've heard of a very good farm close to a lovely safe sandy beach. It's in Pembrokeshire—oh, a little place, between St. David's and Fishguard. The children would get real country food there to build them up." Not that either of them looked any worse for having had chicken-pox, and their spots had all gone. "Suppose I find out if the farmer's wife can take the three of us?"

"That will be fine," said Melanie, with obvious relief.

She did not care where Jennifer and Johnny and Unity went for a holiday so long as she was left in peace to get on with her work. Moreover, there was the pleasant thought that she would have Jonathan entirely to herself, and Melanie was longing for him to ask her to marry him. He seemed so vague and dreamy these days. Of course this museum opening was a headache to them both, but surely she could work him up to show a lover-like interest in herself while Jennifer and the children were out of the way.

After clearing breakfast and making beds, Jennifer avoided Johnny and Unity. She slipped round to the poodles' kennels, put them on leads for a walk, but instead of going uphill to fields, she went to the main road and to the nearest public call box. She knew there was a telephone in Alderman Price's house, as well as in his shop, and soon she had contacted Gerald. It was such a joy to hear his voice, although it sounded cool and distant and made her feel glad she had a suitable excuse for ringing him. He owed her an apology for his rude-

ness that Thursday, however provoked he might have been, and in spite of her longing to reinstate herself in his eyes, she was not going to be "crawly-wally" as Dilys used to say. It was he who ought to make the first move. She had been bitterly chagrined that he had done nothing during the intervening period. Even now, he did not offer any apology, only politely offered to ring Molly Jones early that evening and find out if she could take the party. He promised to phone Jennifer after speaking to Molly. Would she be at Derwen all the evening?

As it happened, Jennifer was having supper with Marty in the flat her aunt had temporarily rented, so she told Gerald to ring Arosfa. She was staggered when he said Mrs. Davies had asked him as well.

"I can tell you then what Molly says." •

Darling Aunt Marty, was Jennifer's inward exclamation on hearing this. She did not know there was any coolness between her niece and Gerald. It was just an old lady's notion of helping on a budding romance, and Jennifer felt intensely grateful at the easy way of meeting Gerald again.

Her heart beat as she dressed and took special pains with her make-up. She did wonder though what kind of a meal Aunt Marty would provide, for she was a hopeless cook, but on this occasion Marty's friend, Mrs. Williams who lived in the downstairs flat, had done all the preparations so the result was quite good. •

Gerald was at his best with Aunt Marty, jollyng her, flattering her, and even teasing her. She was vivacious and charming, not putting on her dignified Tomlinson manner. She did not look with favour on the West Wales holiday, evidently considering the minding of Melanie's children an imposition upon Jennifer. Gerald told Jennifer that Molly Jones would be pleased to have them on the following Friday.

"How long are you going to stay, darling?" her aunt enquired.

Jennifer said the holiday would last a fortnight. They had to come back on the Friday because of the museum opening ceremony, which was taking place on Saturday, "three weeks yesterday."

"Of course you are going to that, Mrs. Davies?"

Marty shook her head and the Tomlinson expression, another of Dilys' descriptions, came over her face.

"No, certainly not."

"Oh, Auntie, you will, won't you?"

"No, darling, I have ceased to be Mrs. Davies Derwen because of your father's defacement of our family house, and I shall not be a party towards condoning such wanton vandalism by attending this museum affair. I, at least, have respect for our Tomlinson forbears, a respect Jonathan has lost since his association with that widow."

Gerald had often jeered at Jennifer's ironmaster ancestors so she dare not turn to him in case she caught a sardonic look in his eyes. She fingered a piece of bread nervously. To Gerald, the Tomlinson defects culminated in Jonathan Evans, but he was not thinking of mockery or sarcasm that evening. He could see Jennifer was embarrassed by reference to some disagreement between her father and aunt, so Gerald tactfully asked when Mrs. Holmes and the Fraziers would be returning, and the tension was lifted as Marty gave a verbal summary of Rhoda's last letter, promising to read it in full after the meal.

Rhoda wrote an amusing, witty letter, relating the Americans' zeal for castles, churches, and ruins, an enthusiasm she did not share. Nevertheless, she was enjoying the holiday and found her new friends to be agreeable companions, which augured well for her stay in the States with them. Professor Frazier had taken hundreds of photographs and, in the letter, she enclosed prints of some Tremynach ones that he had had developed. There was one of her dressed-up in Welsh costume, but she said this would have to be retaken since the old world

Welsh atmosphere was marred by a television aerial protruding from the cottage roof.

"I didn't notice that when the Professor was taking your aunt," remarked Gerald to Jennifer.

Perhaps it was the memory of his absorption with her, not the photographer or photographer's model, that brought a red flush to his cheeks and made him turn his dark eyes from looking at her to the print. Marty left them to make coffee. Rather shamefacedly, he began to apologise for having an engagement on Thursday this week. He had to go to Swansea to meet an old sea captain whom he had known in the Arctic. Jennifer said she would be busy anyway, getting ready for the holiday.

The relapsed into silence. Each wanted to reach the other, yet each was conscious of a barrier. Jennifer wondered if he still despised her for her "daddy-complex" and speculated for the hundredth time how she could convince him that he was the one who mattered most now. Gerald felt she was glad to be with him in her aunt's flat. He knew that she had been hurt by his outburst. He did not want to live his life without Jennifer Evans, but would the shadow of her father still be there? As a second wife it looked as though Melanie Partidge would exploit Jennifer's good nature just as Jonathan Evans did. Here she was, taking these kids on a holiday! Gerald looked down at the carpet, his dark eyes glowering.

Then came the sound of Aunt Marty coming back with the coffee.

No, in spite of everything, he could not lose her again.

Gerald said quickly, "If I can get down to Pwllgwaun, not this weekend but the next, would you like me to do that?"

Jennifer was not very skilful at concealing her feelings, certainly not with Gerald. Her dark blue eyes shone like fairy lights and her lips curved upwards in a smile.

"I'd love you to do that."

They left the flat together and he drove her back to the iron

gates of Derwen. When they said goodnight he gave her a kiss, the first for almost eleven years.

"Take care of yourself. Pleasant journey! I'll be ringing you at Molly's to say exactly when I'm coming."

Then he was gone.

Jennifer found she and the children were to have the inconvenience of travelling by train, a mode of transport Jonathan and Melanie took for granted. Her father looked so tired that she could not suggest he drove them to Pwllgwaun, which was over a hundred miles and of course he would have to return the same day. They were all right from Cardiff to Haverfordwest because it was a main line, but the difficulty was getting from Haverfordwest to the farm, so she had to ring Owen Jones and ask him to meet them at the station with his car or a taxi. Jonathan was not even driving them from Tremynach to Cardiff, for his solicitor, Mr. Rees Williams, offered them a lift there, and Mrs. Rees Williams saved Jennifer the worry of making arrangements for Rhoda's—or rather Dot Frazier's, as they were now—poodles, by saying she would have them for the fortnight.

Before going away, Jennifer spent one afternoon with Dilys. David was back home and hoped to begin work again the following week.

"You'll be able to come to the museum opening then," said Jennifer to her sister.

But Dilys was as determined as Marty not to attend this function. She was far more sensitive to any slight, real or imaginary, to her husband than to herself, and she was most indignant at what she considered the heartless neglect of Jonathan and Melanie in failing to visit David during his recent spell in hospital.

"Daddy always has been lacking in sympathy, but I think it is awful of Melanie. Look how I rushed to Tremynach to be with her when she was in trouble over Stephen Partridge's suicide. And I've had her and the children here time and time

again. In my opinion she's eaten up with selfishness. The least she could have done was to send David a Get Well card."

"She and Daddy have been very busy."

"Don't you make excuses for them. Melanie imposes on you right and left. I think it is awful the way you've got to take Johnny and Unity on a holiday, just as if you were a paid nanny. Where are you actually going in Pembrokeshire? Is it anywhere near that place you went to with Gerald Price?"

Jennifer was obliged to explain it was the same farm and Dilys looked rather intrigued.

"If I tell you something, please don't let on to Melanie, Dilys."

"Of course you can trust me. As for Melanie Partridge, I'm through with her, whether she marries Daddy or not. I cannot stand folks who only think of themselves. This illness of David's has shown me what sort of a creature she is."

It is very soothing to listen to another person abusing someone you do not like and, in this case, Jennifer was happy to feel that the old bond between her and her little half-sister had been restored. She told Dilys the state of things between her and Gerald and that he had said he would come to see her while she was at the farm.

"I hope those children don't blab to their mother because she'll tell Daddy you are pally with Alderman Price's son if she finds out."

"I'll have to chance that," said Jennifer. "At any rate, they can't give the show away while we are at Pwllgwaun because Unity can't write yet and Johnny only prints very slowly. They'll be sending Melanie postcards with crosses for kisses—that's all."

It was a lovely holiday at Pwllgwaun, thought Jennifer, especially after Gerald rang up to say when he would be coming, and on his arrival there was certainly no distrust in his greeting this time. It was like eleven years ago when they confessed their love and embarked on a secret engagement

which proved to be only brief, because thoughts of her father soon dragged back Jennifer to grim reality. But there was no recanting now. And Gerald at last felt confident that his sleeping princess had awakened and come to love him as he wanted.

He proved to be a grand playmate for the children, with his fund of exciting stories and the exciting things he could show them on the seashore. Jennifer mentioned with regret that the beaches did not seem the same without seals. She supposed they had gone away north for the summer. Gerald said there were plenty quite close to the coast in the sea, and Owen Jones told them of another farm, some distance away, where one could walk along rocks and see seals swimming. When Gerald suggested taking the children there, Owen advised him to include a dog in the party, as the morlo were attracted by noises like barking.

The place was not far by car, and then they had to walk through a farmyard, through a rough field, and clamber over rocks until they reached a broad one stretching right out in to the sea. There was no bay near this farm, only inlets surrounded by high, sheer crags. The flat top of the jutting-out little peninsula was covered with patches of coarse short grass. Jennifer was inclined to be nervous lest the children went too near the edge on either side, but found she had no cause to worry about that as Dewi, the sheepdog, thought he had been brought to look after Johnny and Unity. He nudged and nuzzled at their legs, making them keep to the middle as if they were two sheep he must prevent from straying. Once at the furthestmost point, his charges flung themselves down on the ground. Then Dewi rested, his large red tongue hanging out, while he panted with the air of one who has performed a difficult task successfully.

Inducing him to bark was another matter. In the end, Gerald gave up trying and urged the children to sing loudly, hoping that might attract seals.

"They are very curious and if they hear a noise, they'll swim to the surface to see what is happening."

"Are they really here this very minute, hiding at the bottom of the sea?" asked Johnny.

"Yes, they are swimming around, but under the water, and that's why you can't see them. Come on, start singing. What about the Welsh national anthem?"

But the children did not know that. They bawled *The Owl and the Pussy-cat* and *Dickery-Dock*, and a few other favouring, "Mae hen wlad fy nhadau", and as the children did barking. Jennifer lay relaxed, half on a patch of grass and half on bare rock, both warmed by the sun. She felt too lazy to exert herself, but Gerald insisted on her joining him in singing, "Mae hen wlad fy nhadau", and as the children did not know this they shouted until they were tired. But no morlo appeared.

It was a heavenly day, with sapphire sky and a sea reflecting the same soft blue colour. Jennifer watched frothy waves making lines of white fringe and spray sparkling like diamonds as water struck the rocks round the coast. Right down below her was a mass of gurgling, agitated sea, but, away from this, the water moved gently with the breeze, appearing less restless the further one looked towards the vast expanse of open sea.

She stretched luxuriously, enjoying the sunshine, the brilliant gleaming blue, and above all the sheer bliss of being with Gerald. Yes, she had been happy watching seals with him last autumn, just as years before she revelled in his company at the university, but she never felt as she did now.

I wasn't properly in love with him, not even for those few days when we were engaged. If I had been I couldn't have put Daddy first. However much Daddy depended on me, Gerald ought to have been the one who mattered most. That's how it is now.

Gerald was telling the children some story about mermaids.

Dreamily Jennifer heard the words, "Long flowing hair and she combs it while she sits on a rock—like that one over there—and all the time she sings a beautiful song." His eyes met hers and he said, "When a man hears that song he has to follow the mermaid, even when she dives into the sea. Then she takes him to a wonderful palace where she lives."

"A palace right at the bottom of the sea?"

"Yes, that's where the mer-people live."

"Do you think the seals are playing with them down there in a palace, and that's why they don't come here to see us?"

I love him so terribly much, whispered Jennifer to the rippling, frothy water below. She gazed at the lacy patterns it made as it foamed round the rocky headland, and she day-dreamed about her marriage to Gerald and the children she would bear him.

Excited screams and the barking of Dewi roused her. Gerald wriggled up to her and her eyes followed the direction of his. A round dark head was rising out of the sea.

"Man swimming," said Unity.

"No, darling, that's a seal. Oh, there's another one—and another!"

"Have they really come 'cos we sang?"

"Of course! They want to know what the noise is about and why Dewi is barking."

For about ten minutes, they watched a dozen seals showing their bullet-shaped heads above water and swimming around in friendly fashion, staring with mournful brown eyes. Their strangely human aspect made Jennifer tell Gerald that she could almost believe in the mermaid myth herself.

"If only they had long hair."

"Well, you can see how the legend got around."

Suddenly, the seals decided these creatures sitting on the rock were not very interesting after all. One morlo—and Johnny insisted he was the one who had first shown his head—

slowly submerged. The others followed his example, and soon every single seal vanished back into the depths of the sea.

Late that night, as Owen and Molly Jones were preparing to go upstairs to bed, Gerald asked Jennifer to come for a moonlight bathe with him. The host smiled at his wife. He and she knew they were not wanted, and, in any case, it would have been impossible to leave sleeping children alone in the house.

The tide was high so the causeway was covered, but Gerald took Jennifer by boat to the second beach, where they landed and, like beings in a dream, swam in a dark grey sea under a sky lit by stars and moon. They might have been merman and mermaid. As it was, they were simply a pair of lovers for whom nothing in the world mattered but themselves and their love for each other.

Afterwards they lay on the sand beneath towering cliffs, watching the quivering chromium sea, the starry sky, and the round lemon disc stamped with eyes, nose, and mouth, the "man in the moon". Jennifer thought he seemed like a benign god slyly smiling down on them. She had never imagined anyone could be so wonderful as Gerald.

Unlike her, Gerald was not engulfed in the night's enchanted void. Distrust and doubt hovered round, haunting him like unpleasant ghosts, and he was forced to remind Jennifer of an unpleasant duty that lay in front of them. Even now, he dreaded lest she might recoil from carrying out this duty, and perhaps beg for its indefinite postponement.

"When are you going to tell your father about us? Do you want me to see him, or will you do it?"

The determined way Jennifer replied did much to reassure him. She would confess to her father. She hoped Jonathan would accept their engagement without fuss.

"He won't think I am much of a catch socially for you." Great-granddaughter of Noah Tomlinson of Drysgoed, he wanted to say, but refrained.

"Nonsense!"

"And he hates my father, especially since the Nebo business."

"Whatever Daddy says won't affect me. I hope he will be nice, but if he is awkward it won't make any difference, I promise you."

Jennifer only stipulated that she waited until after the museum opening to tell Jonathan.

"I ought to do it personally. I can't write it in a letter, and we don't go back to Derwen till Friday. Well, with this ceremony next day, I can't upset him beforehand."

She knew that her father would be upset, but it was something for which she was prepared and resolute about facing.

"I'll break the news to him on Saturday evening. I promise you I won't put it off any longer than that."

They lay stretched out on the sand, looking at the moon, then at its light reflected in the shimmering sea.

"Do you think you'll mind us living with my father?" asked Gerald. "I don't feel I ought to leave the old man on his own."

"Of course not! In fact, I may have to ask you to let us offer a home to Aunt Marty when the Bates come back and she has to leave the Arosfa flat."

"Okay, and if she wants to be on her own to a certain extent, the house is big enough to make a self-contained flat for her. We could also find room for your Aunt Rhoda if she doesn't get a job when she comes back from the States."

Jennifer had never been inside the aldermanic residence, but she knew the house was a large one and probably old-fashioned. Gerald began to apologise for its deficiencies.

"But you can do all the modernising you want. The old man has always liked you and he'll be so glad I am marrying you that he'll be clay in your hands. He won't mind what you spend on bringing the place up-to-date."

"I haven't a clue about house alterations," she sighed. "I

shall have to get expert advice from Dilys and David. They're always doing something to theirs."

"What Tremynach folk call poching," said Gerald. Then he added, "But about this flat for your Aunt Marty, do you think she can manage with three rooms? There may have to be one for your Aunt Rhoda, and we must keep extra bedrooms for our own kids."

They started to plan how many children they intended to have and how they should bring them up.

All of a sudden, Gerald gripped her arm and told her to look out to sea. They both gazed at a large ship gliding over the water and brilliantly lit from bow to stern, seemingly like a mass of moons held together for a journey through space.

"That's the Irish boat. She's just left Fishguard."

Their eyes followed the illuminated ship as she travelled westwards, making her pathway across the sea.

"Jennifer!"

"Yes, darling."

"You know that I haven't wanted any girl but you and I never will."

"You've been wonderfully faithful to me Gerald, and I haven't deserved it."

His kisses stopped her from continuing to blame herself for the past.

"But do you remember that I told you once that the Arctic never lets go of a man once he has been there?"

"Yes, I do."

"And I warned you that there was a restless devil within me. Oh, I'm resigned to working in the Emporium, and I'm going to stick to it and make lashings of money for you and our children, but I know that sometimes I shall have to break loose for a period. Jennifer, when I come to you, as I know I shall, and tell you the Arctic is calling and I must see the ice again, you won't begrudge me a trip there, will you? I rely on you to understand."

"Yes, Gerald, I'll understand. I'll always understand."

And the two of them watched the boat bound for Ireland, slowly disappearing until she vanished completely over the rim of the western horizon.

Chapter Fourteen

IN EARLY July, the fantastically-shaped twisted branches of the Derwen oak were softened by leaves, which gave the old tree a gentle, kind, appearance, although to Jonathan Evans it was a thing of inspiration and beauty whatever the season. To him the tree was, had been, and always would be, a symbol of power, mystical in strength and might. The spirit of the Tomlinson ironmasters survived in that oak.

He leant against the massive trunk. His father once showed him the thickness of the bark in the lower part by thrusting a knife deeply into it, but without reaching the sap. After Jonathan grew up, he thought it was like that with men. The older one became, the deeper one buried one's true feelings, and, like an oak, the thicker grew the protective cover.

Jonathan was always reticent and inclined to hide his inner sentiments from others, the only exception being his wife. To Vera he told the dreams of his boyhood and manhood. She alone knew about his fears, his conflicts, and his ideals. The first time she came to Derwen he brought her to the venerable oak. It was on a sultry summer afternoon, like today.

"I used to lie underneath, looking up at the leaves, and picturing the dazzling girl I was going to meet some day. I knew that when I met her I should love that girl for the

rest of my life. Now I have found her, and she is standing under my oak tree with me."

"Oh, Johnny, you do say the sweetest things!"

"Everything I say to you, darling heart, is true. Yes, I've found my ideal woman and I am never never going to lose her. I should go stark raving mad without you, Vera. Let me hear you promise, sweetheart, that you will always be mine."

"Why, of course, Johnny pet! We're engaged to be married, and I'm the happiest girl in the world."

He remembered every word of that conversation which had taken place thirty-five years ago. Detailed recollection of other conversations had recently come back to him, springing as it were from the subconscious recesses of his mind where they had lain dormant for so long.

After Vera's death, Jonathan tried to obliterate every shred of memory connected with her. He concentrated all affection on Jennifer. To him she was solely his daughter. He ceased to think of her as being the child of Vera as well. He was determined that none of the things he enjoyed, such as Jennifer's company, his historical research, even gazing at the old Derwen oak,—these should not be marred by thoughts of the Vera who had betrayed him. Only Dilys was a reminder from which he could not escape, a perpetual evidence of her mother's treachery. Except as regards Dilys, Jonathan had done his utmost for years to suppress the slightest recollection of his dead wife, and, on the whole, he had succeeded until the meeting with Melanie Partridge on Paddington Station.

Then the iron control snapped. Melanie's exclamation to her small son, "Oh, Johnny!" made in a plaintive voice that sounded curiously like Vera's, it was this that shattered the defences he had erected. It seemed to Jonathan that there was a striking resemblance between this stranger and Vera. Melanie's eyes haunted him. He fancied he was once again looking into Vera's. He began to dream about Vera at night

and to think continually about her during the day. Increasingly, visions of the past swamped him. The adultery was forgotten as completely as if it had never happened. By now, Jonathan believed Vera had always returned his deep passionate love. He could only think of her as the beautiful woman whom he worshipped and whose memory dominated his entire existence.

Jonathan heard the sound of a car going to the house. It was a taxi ordered by Melanie to fetch Jennifer and the children from Tremynach station. He intended to meet them there but, at the last minute, pleaded tiredness, and as Melanie was unable to drive a car she rang up for a taxi.

Jonathan had forgotten this. He forgot his daughter was due home from a holiday. The constant daydreaming about his dead wife absorbed him so completely that real life happenings were hardly making any impact upon his mind. Only that morning, Melanie said that he did not seem to remember anything, and jokingly added that she fully expected him to forget the museum opening tomorrow. Though Melanie did not know it, that could easily happen, for the past years of married life were growing clearer and more vivid and blotting out the present. It was as though these suppressed memories were seeping through a mound of earth piled on top of a grave in which they had lain buried for years.

His hand caressed an oval lobed green leaf that he pulled from a low bough. Why was this car coming to Derwen? Was it connected with something that needed his attention? Making a violent mental effort, he dragged his mind away from its contemplation of Vera and tried to focus it on present realities. Then he remembered that part of the Tomlinson Memorial Museum had been moved to Derwen and there was to be a grand opening ceremony. Yes, and he had to make a speech. Melanie had written it for him and there was a copy in his pocket. He was supposed to be studying it.

He pulled out the paper and read the first paragraph with-

out taking in any of the meaning. He must concentrate. He owed it to that nice little Melanie, who always reminded him of Vera. For her sake he must make this speech properly. Like Vera, Melanie spurred him to accomplish things. She was so enthusiastic over helping him with the second local history book, and Jonathan groaned as he thought of the amount still to be written. He was so weary that he did not want to write another word. He did not want to make a speech at this ceremony. He did not care any longer about the Tomlinson Memorial Museum. Neither did local fame or praise matter. All he wanted was to be left in peace so that he could think and think about his darling wife, could re-create her image, could fancy he was listening to her voice.

"Hi! Hello! It's me. Look, I'm back. 'Unity and Jennifer have come with me. We've had a smashing time at the sea, I swam, and I went in a boat, and I saw seals . . ."

Joanmy chattered on and on, holding Jonathan's hand and pulling him in the direction of the house. Jonathan was overjoyed to see the little boy. He did not listen to a word the child was saying, only thought that here was the son he had always wanted, the son he and Vera ought to have had.

Jennifer thought, Daddy has been overworking dreadfully while I've been away. Really, Melanie hasn't much sense. I hope she looks after him better than this when they are married. He must take a long rest after this opening. I expect he is worried about it going off successfully. Perhaps that is why he seems more absent-minded than ever. I do hope he will become his old self again when this palaver is over.

Was he nervous about proposing to Melanie? He might be hesitating because of the big difference in their ages. Jennifer wished she could help. If her father would only confide in her! But that was something he never had done, not real, deep-down confidences. In the past, in spite of their close companionship, he was always a little remote, like a solitary stack

rock near the shore but not joined to it, perpetually surrounded by sea, and inaccessible even by boat.

Tomorrow evening, when all the excitement was over, then she would get her father alone and confess that she intended to marry the son of Alderman Price.

Poor darling Daddy! I do hope he won't take it too badly. Oh, how I hope he will be nice to Gerald. He's bound to like my darling if only he will put his prejudices on one side.

Melanie could not sleep. She was too keyed-up about the coming ceremony. Being a worrier by nature, she kept going over every detail of the arrangements. She wondered if Jonathan had got down to studying the speech she had written for him. She did not expect him to deliver it well. His voice was monotonous and his manner so stiff.

But he will look impressive, she thought.

Anyone could tell at first glance that Jonathan came of a good family and was an absolute gentleman. He was so different from that ghastly upstart Mummy had taken for a second husband. Melanie gurgled in delighted anticipation of the time when she would display her second husband to mother and stepfather. They did not think much of Stephen. They said he was colourless and had no go in him and ignored her boasts about his brilliant prospects in the museum world. But now, when they learned Jonathan Evans owned a museum and a large mansion and that his ancestors had been wealthy iron-masters, wouldn't Mummy and Mummy's conceited Paul sit up and take notice!

Melanie did not mourn for her dead husband. In her own mind she condemned Stephen as impossible, a descriptive adjective of wide application which meant she threw all blame for failure of their marriage upon him. He must have been batty all along. The way he carried on because she wanted to have children! She had had her own way, of course, but he

made enough rows when Johnny was coming. As for poor little Unity!

I'm such a good mother to them and I have brought them up well. Everybody says they are beautifully behaved. It is lucky that Jonathan is so fond of Johnny. He'll be willing to shell out liberally for Johnny's education and I do want my son to have the best . . .

It did not occur to Melanie that Jonathan might not have the resources to "shell out" on the scale she planned. She pictured Johnny at a good prep school, then Eton, then Oxford or Cambridge, then making headway in a professional career. Unity should go to a nice boarding-school and afterwards her mother intended to see she made the right contacts for getting a socially suitable husband. There was no need for Unity to waste valuable time in studying "as I was made to do." Marriage was the one thing that mattered to a girl, and of course a good marriage.

I think it is dreadful that someone as pretty and attractive as Jennifer is still unattached. So silly of her to fall in love with Stephen! I didn't suspect at first that they were having an affair until I saw through them and how it explained his fury because I turned up in Tremynach. Jennifer is quite idiotic enough to be faithful to his memory instead of looking round for another man. I think she must be as lazy as Jonathan. He doesn't bother to exert himself. I've done all the work for this new museum. He wouldn't have dared to move it to Derwen if I hadn't chivied him up. He was so scared of that abominable Marty. Good job she's cleared out. I detest her selfishness and her swank about being Mrs. Davies Derwen. Well, she's had to drop that now. I think I shall make Tremynach people call me Mrs. Evans Derwen. It sounds more classy than Mrs. Jonathan Evans.

Then came the ever-recurring thought, when is he going to ask me to marry him?

Melanie was positive that Jonathan was madly in love

with her. Sometimes she caught him gazing at her, and the wild look in his eyes scared as well as thrilled her. He wanted her as she wanted him. Why didn't he tell her?

Of course there had been this worrying and exhausting business of moving the museum. Not that Jonathan helped much. He was content to sit mooning at his desk leaving the work to her. It was the same with that book he had been writing for God-knows how long, and would never finish without her prodding him.

Oh, how I wish he would hurry up and pop the question! I want to be able to tell everybody that I'm going to be his wife. I want to feel his arms tight round me. He's so handsome and so strong and so exciting! I want him for my own.

The expression on her face softened and her grey eyes shone with anticipation of future bliss. Melanie wanted the social status of being Mrs. Evans Derwen. She wanted security for herself and for Johnny and for Unity. But she also wanted Jonathan Tomlinson Evans for her husband because she was deeply in love with him.

To Melanie's relief, the next day was fine and warm, for there was no room in Derwen large enough to hold so many people, and it would have ruined the ceremony if rain made the holding of it outside impossible.

On the terrace, raised above the onlookers, were to be Professor and Mrs. Frazier, Mayor and Mayoress of Tremynach, Town Clerk, Jonathan, and the Reverend J. D. Jones. He was included among the V.I.P.s because he was the Mayor's chaplain. Jonathan had Alderman Price in mind when he insisted that no members of the Town Council, other than the Mayor, were to be elevated to a position on the terrace.

On the lawn below were two hundred chairs, hired for the occasion, and, judging from the number of people arriving,

would all be needed. The centre of the front row was reserved for Melanie, Johnny, Unity, Jennifer, Rhoda, and Mrs. J. D. Jones. Marty and Dilys had both refused to come. Jennifer knew Gerald would be there because he had agreed to take a film of the ceremony for Hamilton Frazier who could hardly do it when he was the chief figure.

Melanie was on edge lest there should be some hitch and she looked very relieved when the procession walked across the lawn in front of the spectators, and up the terrace steps, according to plan. At the climax of the proceedings, Professor Frazier was to produce a key, open a door leading from terrace into house, and declare the museum open. Everyone would follow him inside, through that door. But first the Mayor had to speak, then Jonathan, and finally the professor.

In an excellent speech, the Mayor paid tribute to the former ironmasters of Drysgoed, especially Noah Tomlinson who had endowed the museum for Tremynach's benefit. Then he praised the zeal of "our well-known local historian", and referred with enthusiasm to Jonathan's first book, "a great, scholarly work enshrining our glorious past. This town owes a tremendous debt to Mr. Jonathan Evans, a debt that can never be repaid." The Mayor went on to speak about the kindness of Professor Frazier in undertaking to open this part of the Tomlinson Memorial Museum that had found a new home at Derwen. The formal introduction of the professor was to be undertaken by Mr. Evans, so he would now call on him to speak.

As her father rose to his feet to thank the Mayor and introduce Hamilton Frazier, Jennifer looked at the impassive face. She knew he would not show outward pleasure, but inwardly he must be rejoicing over this public recognition of what he and his forefathers had done for Tremynach, however belated he might consider that recognition.

Everyone was waiting for him to speak. The Mayor waited to be thanked. Professor Frazier waited to be introduced to the

assembly. But, after getting up, Jonathan stood silent and unmoving, as though unaware of his duties and engrossed in thoughts of his own. Then, without warning, he collapsed and slid to the floor.

Frozen into immobility, Jennifer sat as though petrified. She could not do anything. She could not even think what to do. She watched Rees Williams and his doctor brother rush up to the terrace. Professor Frazier handed Rees the key that he held, and Rees unlocked and opened the door. He, his brother, and the Reverend J. D. Jones, carried Jonathan into the house. The Mayor appealed to the crowd to remain where they were and kindly wait for a few minutes.

Melanie stood up but she was shaking from head to foot. Jennifer, roused at last to action, put an arm round her. Johnny and Unity sat wide-eyed and very frightened. Unity began to cry and Rhoda comforted her.

"I must go to him," gasped Melanie.

Rees Williams appeared and beckoned to Jennifer.

"All of you go," said Mrs. J. D. Jones to Rhoda. "I'll mind the little ones."

So Melanie and Rhoda followed Jennifer and Rees up the steps to the terrace, through the door, and into the old morning-room, now a curator's office. Some of the former furniture remained and on a couch lay Jonathan. Jennifer looked at the doctor who was standing beside the couch. Her eyes asked the question to which she had already guessed the answer, and his face was enough to tell her it was true.

Jennifer knelt down beside that very dear father, took hold of his hand, and murmured the word Daddy, but she saw he did not recognise her.

Then she felt an arm gently pulling her away and knew it was Gerald's. She got up. She belonged to Gerald, while someone else had a better right to be with her father in his last moments. She made way for Melanie and leant against Gerald, her hand clasped tightly in his, drawing strength from

his comforting support. That was how it would always be. Gerald would always look after her.

Jonathan's eyes were open. He appeared to be gazing steadily at Melanie who could hardly restrain her sobs. Those watching assumed his last dying look to be for her, but they were mistaken. Jonathan Evans only saw the alluring grey-green eyes of Vera, his darling beloved wife, and as life ebbed away he thought she was speaking to him, using their private pet name, and that he could hear her saying, "Oh, Johnny."

The seal nurseries along the west Pembrokeshire coast were again crowded with mothers and babies when Jennifer and Gerald went to spend their honeymoon at Pwllgwaun Farm in early October. The wedding had been a quiet family affair because of Jonathan's death in the previous July.

It surprised Jennifer that so many tributes should be paid to her father and she was glad that Melanie undertook to finish his book on the old ironworks. As Jonathan Evans' will made Jennifer his sole heir, she held the trusteeship of the Tomlinson Memorial Museum. Even Gerald and Alderman Price understood that she felt compelled to carry out her father's wishes by keeping the museum under private ownership, not passing it to the Town Council. Melanie was continuing as curator and Jennifer, who did not want to live at Derwen, allowed her to have a flat there. Marty was still at Arosfa and Rhoda was in the United States.

Jennifer sat on a dark, slaty-blue rock, three-quarters of it surrounded by water, and she watched seals on the adjoining beach. She had been there so long that they had recovered from their first panic at the sight of this human being. Cows basked with their calves. Others shuffled towards the sea, and one baby climbed on its mother's back getting a ride as the parent lumbered over the sand.

Twisting round, Jennifer looked out to sea. So much had happened since she came here with Gerald a year ago, and the

wonder of their love threw a haze over the real everyday life to which they must return. But that was not yet. They had a few days longer to enjoy this magic spot.

Here was Gerald climbing along the rock and telling her she looked like a mermaid sitting there, only she wanted long flowing hair and a gleaming fish's tail.

As he kissed her, Jennifer reminded him that in all probability seals were the origin of the mermaid myth, and Gerald reproached her for being so matter-of-fact and scientific on their honeymoon. When he looked at her, he said, he preferred to believe in the traditional beautiful siren who came out of the sea to lure a poor human male, like himself, down into the watery depths to an enchanted land from which the sea maiden would never let him escape.

THE END

